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THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
SILENCE



# THE PHILOSOPHY OF SILENCE

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*By*

ALICE BORCHARD GREENE, Ph.D.



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RICHARD R. SMITH  
NEW YORK                            1940

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To M B M

Founder and Director of the School of  
Applied Philosophy, New York

Teacher of the Wisdom-lore of all the  
great races,

Guide in the evolutionary processes  
with which the philosophy of Silence  
is concerned,

To whose inspiring teaching I owe the  
impetus for this book.



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## PREFATORY NOTE

It will be noted that occasionally I have capitalized the word *Silence*. This has been done where it is used in its advanced, disciplined sense, indicating a silence deeper than the abstinence from words. Thus, where the word refers to the kind of stillness that means great activity on other than physical levels, this profounder meaning is emphasized by the use of the capital letter. But, on the whole, the context describes the type of silence sufficiently to need no such further distinguishing mark. Where the early and later stages of the practice of silence overlap, and hence where a choice of small or capital letter existed, I have used the small one, preferring not to glorify the word unnecessarily, nor to lay it open to the charge of having a cultish tinge.

A. .B G.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
SILENCE



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A wide range of reactions greets the very mention of the subject of Silence—reactions extending all the way from blank astonishment that any normal person would think such a—well, vacuum—worthy of discussion, to eagerness to learn about something intriguing.

By some the subject is scorned as having no possible relation to practical life; in others it provokes a lively interest in its implications. One thing, however, is certain despite the vagueness surrounding the subject of Silence—it is becoming increasingly challenging in this Western part of the world.

The attitude this inquiry seeks to foster lies between the two conflicting and equally exaggerated reactions usually accorded the subject of Silence—credulity and skepticism. I will attempt to show up the fallacies in the uncritical acceptance of the practice by those whom its fruits lure. This credulity entices often to a headlong rush toward easy methods of obtaining the hoped-for benefits, in ignorance of the disciplines involved in all real uses of silence as a means to an end.

I will attempt to show also wherein the cynic falls wide of the mark when he asserts there cannot be positive factors in a practice seemingly so negative. Both positions fail to shed any real light on the subject. The enthusiast's view is unreliable and erratic; the scoffer's contributions are usually sterile.

The need is for an objective and philosophical approach to the vast subject of Silence, which heretofore has been considered largely from the inspirational, devotional or sectarian point of view. Fortunately, the scientific spirit of this age is thinning the emotional atmosphere, giving basis to the hope that the good inherent in the right practice of silence will rise to the top under honest inquiry.

One aim of this brief volume is to furnish definitions and backgrounds, out of which may arise answers to perplexing questions about so complex a subject—such questions as, is silence, even directed silence, actually more than it seems on the surface? Are there varieties in its practice? What are its goals, and are there degrees of success in attaining them? Are there dangers in its practice? Has it physical value? Psychological value? Has it played a rôle in great achievements, material or otherwise? Wherein does it differ from reflection and sustained, earnest thinking? Are its objectives of interest to the East alone, where it is so well-established a practice, or to the hard-headed and practical West also? Can East and West ever meet on this subject?

Should the term really conjure up, instead of a void or emptiness, vistas of a whole field of experience? If these vistas should prove to have a basis in fact, the West will want to know more about them. But we in the West will have to satisfy ourselves as to whether the use of silence has proven fruitful in ancient and in modern times.

The posing of even these few questions gives some indication of the vastness of the area to be explored. It would take many volumes to do the subject justice. In this brief one I seek to map out only a few main roads

through a subtly complicated, cavernous terrain; to point out the corridors that lead only to dead walls, and distinguish them from those more likely to reward the explorer's efforts; to indicate that there are recesses in which treasure may be found; and finally to suggest those trails which lead one out of the labyrinth, with its gloom and pitfalls, to light and security.

I say *suggest*, for these are not material paths to be traversed on the knowledge of the guide. To a large extent one must be a lone pioneer, notwithstanding the fact that thousands have made the journey in all ages, and are still making it. Yet it is not an individually charted pilgrimage, but is governed by laws, as universal as those of physical nature—and as inexorable. Of this we have verification in the experience of at least the few in all great races who have most right to speak.

So have said the sages in all countries, the great Teachers of men, the messengers of wisdom-lore to our deaf and blind humanity. For Silence, in the higher reaches of its practice, has enlisted the best efforts of the best of men. There is nothing I would presume to add to their teachings; these are ample. But our present day has lost touch with those teachings, because they are rarely implemented with techniques intelligible to the modern mind. Or else their expression is foreign to modern thought-forms. Neither circumstance impairs their validity. The findings of atomic physics and of the psychology of the unconscious, for instance, have in no sense detracted from the glory of the ancient teachings these sciences verify. They can only rechristen that glory. It is in this scientific spirit that I will make a humble attempt to translate time-tested truths, in part, into practical language. It is my hope in the future to contribute to their

elucidation in the combined language of the forum and of the laboratory.

A desire to penetrate the meanings and values which wise men both of ancient days and of the East today have attached and are attaching to the practice of silence, is slowly awakening in the Western section of the world.

To some extent this interest has its roots in normal, healthy inquiry into fields of human endeavor hitherto little known in the West. In part also this interest is forced into expression by the discontent with ordinary pursuits, and is thus a compensatory swing of the pendulum away from over-activity along extroverted lines.

The connection between the hectic pace of empty lives and the neglect of deep-lying values dormant within the individual is becoming increasingly obvious. The intelligent are seeking to break through this impasse in ways acceptable to the critical mind. Voices like those of Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard are multiplying in the land, with their cry that man's ambitions are so unworthy compared to his means or capabilities that he is bound to suffer from mental, emotional and physical mal-adjustments. Broadly speaking, his aim—at least in the West—has been materialism. The rejection of that materialism, in favor of a vague, watery psychism, "spirituality," is no higher in level. These "better minds" refer to human resources on the whole still latent. The practice of silence, according to the weight of testimony, seems to point toward the development of these resources.

Whatever may be prompting the increased interest in the subject of Silence—bias in favor, curiosity, even prejudice against, there still remains the task of furnishing the Western mind with the principles and rationale of the practice.

In the form of meditation, especially, it is luring people's imagination—sometimes, to be sure, down the primrose paths of untrammeled fantasy, but often also in other directions, where sterner uplands open wider perspectives. In any case, the deliberate use of silence is no longer the concern of the few odd ones, if ever it was. Frankly or covertly it has taken its place in the lives of thousands, for better or worse. And as it may be a far more potent force either way than a superficial acquaintance might suggest, it is worthy of unbiased scrutiny, and invites to deeper study.

That deeper study will not be carried very far in this inquiry, which aims merely to shed light upon the portals marking the entrance to the profundities to which practices in this field can lead. The search into deeper-lying implications will be left for subsequent treatment.

In the meantime, may this study of Silence help toward the revaluation of a practice which all the enlightened of the race have united in regarding as a first essential, an indispensable bridge to, and, when used by the trained and discriminating, a powerful instrumentality in the quest for, permanent, spiritual realities.

Even the limited evidence for which alone there is room in this little study will, I hope, assist toward perspective and open-mindedness. The evidence has been selected from an almost boundless accumulation, on the basis of authority of source, representative character and appeal to the Western mind. Thus tested and restricted, the material nevertheless reveals the many values inherent in the right use of silence—its place in the scheme of things, from the practical point of view as well as from the philosophical.

My purpose has been to examine into the practice of

silence as observed in many different climes and times, and to do this in the scientific spirit, though briefly, seeking to aid the growth of discrimination. I shall take into consideration degrees, grades and types of silence; and, in addition to the questions previously raised, such others as the relation of the practice to current Church problems and to such broader problems as revelation, inspiration and intuition.

It is in religious usage, including the philosophical schools, both in the East and in the West, in ancient and modern times, that the fullest range of the practice of silence is to be observed. Hence this investigation finds in the religious field its most extensive laboratory, and places its emphasis thereon. It will be shown, however, that the data in this province are not isolated or specialized, but are paralleled in other, more "practical" fields, and can be made to contribute to a generally more stabilized and richer living.

If the testimony of profound thinkers, saints, mystics and spiritual leaders in every great tradition is an appropriate criterion, there is evidence on all sides that the cultivated use of silence, in its fuller ranges, is the open door to religion as a direct human experience. Almost infinite are the possibilities here both for the Church and for those who seek independently to make their relationship with Deity, the cosmos, the universe, or whatever name they may use to designate the larger contacts toward which they may aspire. To bridge in some manner the gap between the individual and the whole of which he is a fragment is a primary urge, subconscious if not conscious. If the Church continues in what some see as its failure to satisfy this deep-seated

human need, it will lose in vitality even more than it already has lost.

Significantly, a number of advanced clergymen, both in this country and abroad, are questioning whether, in ignoring the use of silence as a disciplined, individual practice, they have not pulled out of the main stream of religion into the backwaters of social and community welfare. Chapter VIII glimpses the present struggle back toward a re-vitalized institution, and the perhaps critical rôle which Silence—that elusive, seemingly quiet and harmless practice—may play in determining the outcome.

And beyond the Church there is society as a whole. If the practice of silence has values to contribute to the individual, is it not logical that assimilation of these will advance the well-being of the community? Such progress may be less spectacular than attempts to reform institutions, but perhaps it is more basically rooted. It may be slow, since it is the sum of individual accomplishment, but in the long run it is likely to be faster, as many a prophet has foretold, with the speed of the tortoise in his ultimate victory over the hare.

In blocking in the contour of the majestic edifice which is the philosophy of Silence, I have had to slough off many excrescences and remove false façades. Sifting through material for the principles involved, dispassionate analysis entailed drawing distinction between the wheat and that which was indubitably chaff. Therefore I have sought to utilize analysis in paving the way to synthesis, to insight into the rationale of the practice, and to understanding and acceptance of its contribution.

I owe to my twelve years of work at the School of Applied Philosophy, New York, first as student, then years later as faculty member, such equipment as I may

have for both the analysis and the synthesis of the subject in hand. This school is making a study of man's higher mental and psychic development, and his transcendental faculties, in much the same way that academic institutions are studying the material sciences and the objective world.

The mature practice of silence, as described in this book, is the gateway to experience and realizations attainable only through the higher faculties of "heart," will and mind, and the cultivation of life in these areas. Happily these experiences are amenable to critical observation, comparison, and deduction—that is, to examination and evaluation by the scientific method. Special techniques worked out at the above-mentioned school have already rendered good service in confirming "from below up" what sages and seers have pronounced "from above down."

Much is required of the student of, or rather, the aspirant to first-hand knowledge of the wider reaches of his own being and the larger realities to which it can lead. The practice of silence and the development of the higher consciousness in the more advanced stages of that practice, are only part of the changes he must bring about in himself. Of equal importance is the increasing application, in practical, everyday life, of the knowledge and insight he has gained, and the transformation of obstructive personality trends.

How amply rewarding is such work, and how refreshing and satisfying mentally and psychically I have referred to only passingly in this treatise. This is partly because the evidence, to which most of the book is devoted, is largely historical in nature and should be allowed to speak for itself. The fact that the material assembled

is mainly historical—and thus perhaps less human and practical than so vital a subject could be—is due to the fact that it was gathered in preparation for my Doctor's thesis at Columbia University. "Authoritative" sources only are acceptable for such purposes, meaning in effect data already published, and excluding first-hand experimental work, in spite of the requirement for "an original study." More genuinely original investigation is not looked upon with favor, however significant it may be in penetrating new frontiers, or exploring in new and more systematic ways, the as yet unclassified world of the human psyche.

I have no quarrel with this attitude. The university is the conservator of knowledge, not the pioneer in making attainable new experience, or new approaches to old experience. Only in the realms of physical science is it more venturesome, and that only within the past few decades. In physical science and its satellite subjects. Of these psychology, including the modern psychology of the unconscious, must be considered one. Such studies are directed toward the control of the environment and a better physical and mental adjustment to it. But their entire range takes in only a fraction of man's capacities and potential development. The ancient psychology was actually more "a science of the soul," more comprehensive of the whole being, though it lacked the organization and the mechanical aids so readily available today. Empirically it often went much further than even the boldest study in our universities of the so-called "supernormal" phenomena. Incidentally, some of the results obtained by students in the beginning grades of training at the School of Applied Philosophy furnish

interesting comparisons with these studies, now arousing such wide attention.

It might well be the profitable course to devote more time, effort and money to investigating the reaches of the human organism beyond the body and personality problems. The need for the release of the life in those domains was never greater than in these present times of distress and insecurity. The very methods which men have employed so cleverly in their achievement of material progress must now be applied in another direction—toward their own human nature and its transformations, if material progress is not to prove their Nemesis rather than the great goal they have made of it.

Since verifiable, progressive and outstandingly constructive results are to be achieved in the field of the development of men's higher faculties, it remains for the earnest seeker and scientific inquirer to adopt methods and procedures suitable to its conditions. That, by the way, is a basic requirement of all scientific investigation. Failure to meet it has been the doom of numerous supposedly scientific studies of psychic states and supernormal phenomena. My testimony is reinforced by the experience of all in the training department at the School of Applied Philosophy who have advanced beyond beginning stages. Few of the findings have so far been made publicly accessible.

I trust the time will come soon when some of these will be available. In the meantime I want to pay tribute to this school and its Director for the distinguished pioneer work they are doing in bridging the chasm between the indubitable but vaguely apprehended supernormal experiences man has always encountered, and the hard-headed testing and discrimination which material science

has so thoroughly, and as I believe so rightly, impressed as a need upon the Western world. If the methods of that science can be used to aid and clarify, instead of merely to limit and exclude, an important new concept will already have won ground. If they can be used to penetrate ever further beyond the frontier of man's present knowledge of his own being, a critical turn in the road of human progress will have been passed, and a new—and at the same time age-old—"treasure-house of resource and power" be disclosed to suffering humanity.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SILENCE

“Action, action, action,” cries Youth.

“Not so fast,” cautions Wisdom. “Whither bound? What kind of action does the situation demand?”

“Oh, we are sick unto death with the caution and theorizing of our elders,” responds Youth impetuously.

Wisdom, knowing the futility of attempting to halt the willful and the heedless, must stand aside. Years later he who was Youth again encounters Wisdom.

“How now?” he asks of the erstwhile Youth.

Dejectedly the latter replies, “For years on end I was wed to the cult of Action and thought the union sublime. In the midst of it I could not see that what so absorbed me was activity around a circle, in a rut, or scuttling along a downward spiral. Now I am exhausted and disheartened. Yet I seek afresh. With the tiny spark of life still remaining in me, I still seek action, but now I know I seek only constructive action.”

“What your intelligence could not make apparent to you, pain has eventually done,” comments Wisdom. “If you sincerely seek action that travels in an upward spiral, action with satisfying and permanent results, there is only one path to it, and that lies through the portals of Silence.”

“Instruct me in such paths of going and doing,” replies the now willing and eager erstwhile Youth, “for now I

understand what you meant when you bade me reflect before I acted."

The use of silence counseled here by Wisdom is only one of many uses, and by no means the most significant. True, it is perhaps the most practical, serving as it does to give direction and purpose to action. Silence in this aspect calls for only a temporary cessation of outward flowing energy and a stilling of speech.

Of course, in emergencies, when time is of the essence, the success of the response will depend not upon the silence of reflection but upon the speed with which previously acquired knowledge can be shot to the surface and made to serve the crisis on hand. Reflection, had there been time, might have produced better results. Wherever possible, of course, time should be allowed for making appraisal of the pros and cons, for determining which factors in a situation are causes and which are effects.

To withdraw from the battle temporarily and betake oneself to a promontory, ignoring calls to reenter the fray until profit has been won from the silent reconnaissance—these are elements of intelligent fighting we can all copy from the good general. What if the world mistakes apparent inactivity for inaction? Provided it does not serve as a cloak for laziness, and work below the surface is actually going on, the results will speak for themselves. When action follows, it is likely to have a new dynamic, as well as that enduring merit we call soundness.

Very different in purpose, degree and quality is the religious type of silence. Outwardly it resembles reflective thinking. Both appear on the surface as inarticulateness, a withdrawal into the self, a turning away from the ex-

ternal world, a denial of outer stimuli. But here the resemblance stops. A glance beyond the obvious, and distinct differences are to be noted.

The main part of this inquiry will be devoted to the consideration of those types of silence whose aim is ulterior to that of reflection or scientific thinking, and which involve more conscious and elaborate preparation. These more complex types demand far more than the withdrawal of attention from the periphery of life. As a preliminary measure this withdrawal—a disengagement from outer stimuli—is a minimum essential. After this, and only then, all energies are, in directed uses of silence, drawn to the core of being, there to be made use of in ways more significant to the practitioner than even the better orientation to the outward scheme of life which may result from reflection.

Reflection is really only a preliminary form of silence, compared with the wide range of meanings possible to the term. But the better we understand what is involved in an early stage, the more prepared we are to expand previous ideas about silence to that which it actually does encompass.

Reflective thinking is usually concerned with external problems, with questions arising from the environment. Probably the most important use of reflection is in scientific thought. The object in drawing away from outer distractions is to focus the mind on the problem in hand. Such inward direction of the mental powers is essential in working through to relationships, implications and conclusions. Concentration demands an atmosphere of quiet. In other words, reflective thinking is undertaken for the purpose of digesting and assimilating facts and theories.

The scientific thinker abstracts a point for considera-

tion, usually from the world of sense observation; he grooms and clarifies his thoughts about it, discarding the irrelevant, adding new facts as they come to light, sharpening his judgments—all to the end of helping his research to drive the problem further back and nearer to its roots. Such processes have as their goal further knowledge of the environment and extensions of control over it. In other words, however intense his concentration and withdrawal, the scientific thinker is concerned with *externals*. In most scientific analyses, whether in the field of mathematics, engineering, medicine, or astronomy, the effort is directed toward pushing back the frontiers of knowledge of the physical world.

When direction weakens, and drives from the subconscious begin to enter, in wish and fantasy, reflection may degenerate into mere pointless rumination. Reflective thinking may then go little beyond mere physical silence. The individual as a whole may actually be far from silent. Not only are his thoughts intensely active, but he may actually be psychically noisy. His emotions tend to scatter, as indicated often by restlessness, pacing of the floor, twirling of his watch-chain, vest button or hair—to mention only a few of the indications that he is far from stilled inwardly.

Long-sustained thinking on any subject seems to impose a hardship on the human mind, and one which it rarely undergoes. Yet for the purposes of this little study the less controlled degrees of reflective thinking will be omitted, as well as the simply involuntary or evasive silence of individual or group. It is the lack of fruit from these which has prejudiced investigation and comparison among the higher forms.

An important trend in speculative thinking is begin-

ning to make itself felt. Many a fine modern mind is calling attention to the snags man strikes when his sole concern is the conquest of environment. More and more emphasis is being put on the necessity of pushing back simultaneously the frontiers *both within* and *without* the individual. This is the challenging note throughout Dr. Alexis Carrel's book, *Man the Unknown*. He and those similarly dissatisfied with the fragmentary outlook of orthodox science imply, if they do not directly state, that if the advancement of knowledge does not aid man *in understanding himself* and in finding satisfaction in living, it becomes an empty conquest.

The drive of the forward-looking scientist in the direction of linking up what he knows to what he is, is not unrelated to the religionist's aspiration toward "the life more abundant." The religionist does not search for this life in the material world. Is the scientist, in his more truly reflective moments, facing the question, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Silence as employed in reflective thinking and that used in religious meditation may have as their only similarity their common abstinence from speech. Actually their paths differ widely. For one thing, the religious type of silence engages more of the human set-up than does reflection. In the former, more of man's being must be ingathered, must be progressively stilled, and consciously directed to subtle but vital purposes.

Furthermore, religious meditation has a totally different orientation. To be sure, it aims, like scientific thinking, to push back frontiers—but these frontiers are *within the self*. It explores the inner and not the outer world—the subjective and not the objective. It is directed toward an

inner unity, toward increased control of the self and not toward control of the environment.

The seeker of religious values is primarily concerned with life and its invisible sources, rather than with its manifestations and behaviors or their immediate causes. More specifically, he is concerned with his own relationship to these invisible forces, which he calls Deity. His concern is not his relationship to other objects, but to *being*. Data which are primary to the materialistic thinker, are secondary to the religious seeker; he does not underestimate them, if he is of a high grade mentally, but he considers them a particular expression of the life force, a phase of the phenomenal, sensory world. His chief interest is in the noumenal, supersensory world.

To the religionist the world of values and qualities is of greater importance than the world of concrete fact; hence his energies, gathered together in silent meditation, are directed to those aspects of reality. The goal of his search is designated in differing traditions as "life more abundant," "the larger life," "communion with God," "rebirth," "regeneration," "seeing into the nature of one's own being," "spiritual experience," "transformation of the self," etc.

\* The practice of the religious type of silence necessitates a progressive stilling of the physical, emotional and mental areas. Because of the many steps involved in this process and because of the difficulties encountered en route, many religious groups, to be considered later, made their members undergo rigorous training. Not only surface areas require stilling; the process goes much deeper. It calls for an awareness of, and a cleansing of, subconscious areas as well, a bringing up to consciousness of concealed hopes, wishes, fears, repressions. In this part

of the process psychoanalysis has in recent times begun investigation, but already its approach is proving too narrow.

The religious seeker knows that peace of mind is "the first courtyard." His consequent sense of integration, rest and ease are the very antithesis of the drives which energize research. The seeker after spiritual goals knows that worlds other than that registered through his five senses will not become accessible to him until his silence is deep, permeating all his being.

Thus the type of silence he practices is cultivated and disciplined, while that of the scientific thinker is relatively uncultivated and incidental, however vigorous his mental activity. The silence of the religionist, deliberate and profound, has as its by-products on the way to the goal, inner conquests, spiritual riches and serenity. That of the materialistic thinker, as already indicated, finds its rewards in outer conquests—increased knowledge of the environment and control over it.

A balance between these two opposite orientations would solve the dilemma in which both types, in their one-sidedness, are likely to find themselves. We see that swing from one extreme to the other if we compare the outlook of the Middle Ages with that of today. At that time we witnessed, even in the masses, the one-sided emphasis on religious values. More recently the pendulum has probably swung too much toward the values of materialistic science. Long-range thinking today is attempting to reconcile the apparent conflict between the two and to retain the values of both. Ultimately, it might well be said, one without the other is of little avail. The religionist without the virile mind is in danger of dissociation from his environment, with a consequent ina-

bility to affect it constructively, and is subject to no end of error. The scientist who never gives a thought to his spiritual development is in danger of being at odds with himself, is subject to increasing restlessness, may at any time be overwhelmed by a sense of futility, and, at worst, does not care how destructively his findings are applied.

The Western world is far more interested in action than in deep reflection or silence as a means to any constructive end. It is aware these practices abound in the East. And it is that very fact which makes them suspect in the West. The Western mind, with its literal point of view, sees them as inaction, as evasion of reality, as an unwillingness, if not an inability, to grapple with harsh facts. On the whole, the Westerner distrusts the Eastern way of life, believing that such books as Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* prove the Easterner to be unequal to the task of conquering disease, filth and poverty. The control of environment being of paramount importance to the Westerner, he is apt to be prejudiced against those to whom it is unimportant, and hence not inclined to examine beyond the negative aspects of Eastern ways.

But, on the other hand, the emptiness of such material advancement as the Westerner does achieve, often depresses him. He must admit that the Easterner is not plagued by this sense of futility. Challenged by this fact to check on the direction of his progress, he begins to inquire. What of this extensive use of silence the East practices? This reaching for something neither seen nor heard—is it for other than dreamers?

We shall find that both group and individual practices of silence, consciously employed, run a gamut from the superficial and negative to intensive participation in experience and the attainment of highly positive values.

We shall find that practitioners range all the way from the casual or untrained user to the adept, with whom the exercise has become both a highly developed art and a skillfully applied science. The novice has usually so little idea of the difficulties to be overcome in the correct practice, so little patience in perfecting his techniques, and so vague a notion of the tremendous powers he may tap, that he is headed in most cases from the start for failure, and ordinarily lands in the quagmires of illusion, fantasy and evasion. His failure to undergo necessary disciplines befogs the issue and spreads misunderstanding in regard to an instrumentality which, in right hands, can become a constructive force of the first order.

Some of the fuzziness which surrounds both the admiration and contempt of the West toward Eastern practices can be removed by the pruning shears of modern psychology. That slowly growing science detects at least those personal colorations and compulsions to which the undiscriminating are blind. The East is notably weak in psychology, and even the West has still far to go. But if we apply what we have learned of the psychology of the unconscious, it would be a first step toward "clarification."

It is to the religious and philosophic uses of silence, with their many grades, degrees, qualities and purposes that the remainder of this study will be chiefly devoted. Less significant, but more popular, ways in which silence is used are also considered, though not as extensively, and more as a means of bringing out contrasts than for themselves.

Such practices as "entering the silence" and meditation are as near as we have come, in the West, to the organized use of silence. In becoming popular, these practices

have deteriorated. In the hands of cultists and faddists who seek speedy roads to spiritual riches, they have lost their real meaning. True, even when misused, these practices may have certain beneficial results, but they are by no means those sought by the more earnest student.

Nor does the participation in most retreats, church-sponsored or otherwise, involve the many factors and the careful discipline called into play in the extended use of silence. None of the relatively superficial uses—reflection, cults and retreats—contributes much insight into the subject, nor do they yield the rationale of the practice. For this we shall have to look into the deeper uses of silence.

The latter part of this inquiry will be devoted to an evaluation of the more representative constructive uses of silence, with a two-fold aim—first to abstract from them the philosophy of the practice, and second to cull from them elements of usefulness for everyday living.

## CHAPTER III

### GROUP USES OF SILENCE

In almost every field of human endeavor in which speech plays an important rôle, so likewise does silence. And the more meaningful the one, the more expressive the other. The drama, formal religion, public meetings—all exemplify the enhancement of speech by the contrast with silence. So does education, as when the skillful teacher makes a deliberate pause to allow main points to sink in, or new ideas to be assimilated. Not so different, all this, from the use of shadow by the artist to bring out lights and highlights.

In the drama, epitomizing so much in life, we might expect to find one of the most effective conscious uses of silence—and we do. Aeschylus used silence impressively to forebode evil. Ominous and stark, the wings of silence move through his tragedies to herald impending disaster—sped by the master dramatist to produce the tension and fear which grips his hearers.

A modern movement in the theatre uses silence quite differently. With a group of French dramatists it becomes a technique even more deliberate than on the ancient stage, and is known as “the theory of silence.” J. J. Bernard is among the most successful in employing this means. He contends that the highest art *implies*, it does not baldly present. Thus he, and others of the modern French stage, have, until recently, been making skillful presentations, full of hidden meaning. Notwithstanding

the subtlety of the implications, these are so compelling that the audience is never in doubt as to the playwright's thought. The meaning is inherent in the situation—so much so in fact, when the technique of silence is well employed, that words become crude superfluities.

The uses to which silence is put in public ceremonials are so numerous and commonplace that they are too much taken for granted, and their significance underestimated. In the customs of all peoples and in all lands, wordless quiet is generally accepted as a symbol of, or a means of increasing, awe, solemnity and reverence.

For instance, each year since the last World War, there has been observed throughout many countries on Armistice Day a simultaneous two-minute period of silence in memory of the dead. In shops, factories, homes and meeting places work and speech are halted for a brief span. For two minutes millions who could probably be united in no other way, are attuned by that solemn silence to a common interest and a kindred thought.

Such resort to silence is, of course, merely an extension of its use in funeral rites to betoken mourning. The death in recent years of several European rulers has afforded spectacular instances of rites in which the devotion and grief of whole peoples have found eloquent form in the silent lines of hundreds of thousands standing for hours, waiting to file by the biers.

Another important public recourse to silence is the impressive one urged upon the English people in their present crisis by their Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. His plea is for a moment's silence daily. The critical events convulsing Great Britain breathe a solemnity which is most fittingly acknowledged in meaningful silence. That poignant pause is in the nature of a prayerful interlude,

during which each is free to meet the crisis in his own way.

The hush that falls upon an audience at the close of a deeply moving address is still another impressive resort to silence. An historical instance was the stillness which followed Lincoln's Gettysburg address. It was "the perfect tribute," as it was sympathetically described by Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews. Tumultuous applause would have been a greatly inferior recognition of its awesomeness and beauty. Applause is lightly given, but not eloquent silence. When the cargo of feeling is too heavy it sinks the frail craft of verbal response.

Is there not about silence, even in its involuntary, crowd usage, something which involves a damming up of the stream of energy and its redirection into channels more effective than outward expression; into springs of feeling, withdrawn a bit from the physical, yet impacting strongly upon it?

It is in the field of religion, however, still more than in the drama and in public life, that we find the most varied and expressive uses of silence. In this chapter we shall deal only with its public and group uses in organized religion. We shall find these uses to be of all grades, running the gamut from the primitive to the highly developed, from weak fantasy to strong, positive achievement in thought and practice.

For historical illustrations of the effective use of silence in ritual let us turn first to primitive cults. Among these the practice in rites and ceremonies is prevalent, particularly when the worshipers believe they have evoked spirits. One explanation offered is fear lest any word uttered might offend those from other worlds claimed to be in their midst.<sup>1</sup>

When a ritual was undertaken among certain tribes to cure disease, every care was exercised to conceal their efforts from the evil spirits.<sup>2</sup> They believed that if they went about their business silently, the attention of the evil ones would not be drawn to their attempt at healing, and they would have a better chance of success. And other explanations are given, probably often rationalizations.

Folk-lore yields abundant cautions against speech at crucial times. Usually the inference is that not only is more going on than meets the eye, but more also than the average human mind can understand. Silence therefore is the only appropriate setting, or silence broken only by the priest or the medicine man, who may be presumed to have greater understanding and hence more right to speak.

Have we, in the primitives' taboo of speech, a recognition of the power of silence to suggest, to foreshadow, to connote, where speech would limit, concretize, and thus belittle? Have we the recognition, on the cruder levels, that for these very reasons silence has the properties essential to a sacred language, a means of communicating with the supermundane?

An instance of the primitive belief in the efficacy of silence is the ritual used by the inhabitants of the Pacific Island of Dobu when planting a garden. The central feature of the ritual is a mute petition for a fruitful season, in the belief that this silent form is more fitting for the spirits than speech. The Dobuans at times murmur softly, for "the yams hear. They say among themselves, 'This is our language—not loud like everyday talk.' If we call aloud the yams say, 'How is this? Are they fighting among themselves?' But when we charm softly

they listen to our speech attentively. They grow big for our calling on them.”<sup>3</sup>

Another reason they give for silence is that they fear the theft of their incantation by others, who could memorize it upon hearing it, and thereby steal the magical power in it. Hence precautions against eavesdroppers are rigidly maintained.

The ancient world—and here the reference is not to the primitive but to the cultivated ancients—made extensive use of silence in its rituals. An early use of silence is apparent in the ancient religious traditions of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. These traditions all gave a prominent place to Mystery rites, or the Mysteries, as they are generally known. The rites dramatized stages of progression within the individual who was on his way toward regeneration. In the Mystery traditions silence was granted an exalted place, both as an aid to worship and as a protection of the rites. It served well to keep from the untaught and the unpurified the knowledge of matters revealed to those who sought initiation into the secrets pulsing at the core of these ancient religions. Since, however, the subject of secrecy is vast in itself, and not strictly within the purview of this inquiry, we shall not go into it further.

From the fragments which have trickled through the barrier of secrecy, both state-imposed and self-imposed, it is possible to discern uses of silence beyond that of a protective cloak. It is quite clear that silence prevailed at the ceremonies themselves, that it was conducive to the mysterious and impressive nature of the rites, and that it helped greatly to create an all-pervading atmosphere appropriate to sacred and profound revelations.

The Eleusinian Mysteries, for instance, concerned

themselves with the drama of Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, and the symbolic abduction of her daughter, Persephone. A single rite at the end of the drama comes down to us through Hippolytus. He relates that a cut cornstalk is shown to the initiates in perfect silence.<sup>4</sup> It is evident that in a drama carried on in agricultural symbolism, corn would be significant and sacred. The solemnity of this final exhibition of sacred symbols is unaccompanied by words, whereas when the candidate for initiation was at an earlier stage of his development, the hierophant discoursed upon the spectacle and interpreted it.

The meaning of this silent exhibition is not given, but it is apparent that the initiate, whose arrival at the stage of insight is implied, knows the meaning inherent in the symbol and needs no words. An understanding in silence pervades the ceremony, symbolic of regeneration within the individual. He is deemed reborn who arrives at *inner* sight and knowledge. And in all the Mystery traditions this penetration was symbolized by the rites, not held to be accomplished by them.

Meager and fragmentary as is the evidence available, it indicates the climactic rôle played by silence in the symbolic rituals.

Partaking of the Mystery tradition on the one hand, and yet standing out in history more clearly as a philosophic school, are the Pythagoreans. Here again we find Silence in a strategic position, playing an integral part in the School—its life, disciplines and teachings. Pythagoras is said to have been initiated into the Egyptian, Chaldean, Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries. The school-community he founded was not, however, built up as a Mystery. Nonetheless the life and the practice of silence

therein, to be discussed later, undoubtedly had ritualistic forms, as in the Mysteries.

The use and appreciation of silence in the Temple rites of ancient Israel is richly attested in numerous passages of the Old Testament. To cull just a few of the outstanding allusions: "Be still and know I am God;" "Praise is silent for Thee, O God;" "The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him;" "Keep thou silence at the presence of the Lord God;" "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God;" "When all things were in quiet silence and night was in her swift course, Thine Almighty Word, O Lord, leaped down from heaven." These are all symbolic of the awesome state of silence in man, held essential by the ancient Hebrews before the voice of God could be heard.

In Christian public worship today Silence attains its highest use, on the formal ritualistic side, in the Catholic Church; on its more informal side among the Quakers.

The high point of the Mass, the central feature of the Catholic religion, is celebrated in silence, after the sounding of a bell has announced the sacred sacrifice. This use of silence, as an accompaniment of the revelation of a mystery, recalls the similar rôle played by silence in the Mystery traditions, where also it was regarded as the sole appropriate response in the presence of an awe-inspiring climax.

In between this ritualistic use of silence and its informal use in Quakerism, lies the devotional silence of the seventeenth-century Protestant sect known as the Quietists. At the beginning, the Quietistic tradition was a positive, even passionate movement. It was only in its later form that it became tainted with negativism and

inaction. Juan Falconi, a Spanish mystic of the seventeenth century, was one of the earliest exponents of the positive phase of Quietism. He deeply influenced the movement in its beginnings in Spain, France and Italy. Ardently he preached the abandonment of outer concerns and the absorption in God, urging utter resignation to the Divine Will.

That this injunction was perceived as positive, and conducive to action, is to be seen in the words and works of the Spanish Quietist, Miguel de Molinos, who lived shortly after Falconi. Molinos became the leader of a great spiritual revival that profoundly affected the religious life of the Continent. His aid was sought by thousands, and his book, *The Spiritual Guide*, which appeared in Rome in 1675, ran twenty editions and was translated into many languages. He taught that God is always communicating revelation to mankind. To become aware of it, man must cultivate outer and inner stillness. He describes two degrees of silence—one in which there is silence of words and requests, and the other which is absolute silence of thoughts and all self-activity. According to him, it is only in the second degree of silence that God operates unhindered<sup>5</sup>—that is, unobstructed by the noise and confusion of the “finite mind.”

The spiritual nature of the silence enjoined by Molinos is revealed in the following passage from his book:

God calls and guides the soul to this inward solitude and mystical silence when he says that He will speak to her alone in the most secret and hidden part of the heart. Thou must enter into this mystical silence if thou wouldest hear the sweet and divine Voice. . . . Rest in this mystical silence, and open the door, so that God may communicate himself unto thee, unite Himself with thee and transform thee into Himself.

The perfection of the soul consists not in speaking nor in thinking much on God, but in loving Him greatly. This love is acquired by means of perfect resignation and inner silence; it all consists in deeds. The love of God has but few words.<sup>6</sup>

This call urging the retreat to a silence deeper than abstinence from words found a widespread and ready response.

The influence of Molinos upon George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, is clearly marked, as is that of Mme. de Guyon and François Fénelon, two famous Quietists, upon Quakerism in general. In Mme. de Guyon's later work we begin to see, however, the beginnings of a less favorable development, the tendency to emotional extravagance—a development which brought on the deterioration of Quietism and its degeneration into passivity. The negative, inactive phase of the movement was not long in following. It is this latter phase which became widespread and is retained even today in popular recollection. That this outgrowth diverged far from the parent stem, as expressed in Molinos, is apparent when we note his definite instruction that inner silence results in *deeds*. He meant the translation of higher thoughts and realizations into life and conduct in the material world.

The spiritual meaning beneath this deeper type of silence, employed by Quietism at its best, had a close kinship with that of the early Quakers, whereas those who came later accepted, for a time, the weak interpretation of later Quietism. The first Quakers, those of the seventeenth century, had a robust and positive understanding of the meaning and power of silence. The rising tide of Quietism on the Continent, still in its original and loftier phase, had had a profound effect on George

Fox of England, and contributed much to give direction to his seeking.

Born in 1624, at a time when upheavals and revolutions, religious and political, weighted the atmosphere, Fox searched for truth and enlightenment with a passionate earnestness. In the outer world there seemed to be only discord, conflict, contradictions. In silence and solitary meditation he sought fervidly to wrest from some source the answers the environment could not give. When at last he had come to solutions that satisfied him, when he had come to "know God" through this patient seeking, the burden of his doubts was lifted. Others who came to believe in him and his experiences, gathered around him. He made them learn to sit still, controlled for a considerable time, prior to listening to him.

From the time Fox came to know the value of silence through his own experience, the custom of sitting silent in meetings for worship has never changed for the Friends. As he had schooled himself to do, so he schooled his followers. "On one occasion he sat in silence for some hours, in order to famish the people from words. At last he was moved of the Lord to speak, and the people were reached by the Lord's power and word of life."<sup>7</sup> This lengthy silence is a rather extreme illustration of the extent of self-discipline his adherents were willing to undergo to achieve their end.

Silence, for this religious leader, was obviously not merely a preliminary to worship, but an actual path of prayer itself, the means of "communion with God." William Penn says of him, "The inwardness of weight of his spirit, the reverence and solemnity of his address and behavior, and the fewness and fullness of his words have often struck even strangers with admiration, as

they used to reach others with consolation. The most awful living frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his in prayer.”<sup>8</sup>

George Fox typified the mystic strain so prominent in much of Quakerism today—a strain which centers upon the search for the “light within,” a light “Wholly Other,” and transcending intellectual thought.

In Quakerism’s second phase, the habit of sitting silent, waiting upon the Lord, was negatively affected by deteriorated Quietism. The emphasis fell upon silence *per se*, which was glorified to such an extent that it took almost a miracle to make anyone speak at meeting. From the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century, Quakerism suffered to so large an extent from this decadent influence that its fibre temporarily weakened, and its practice of silence became relatively arid and unproductive.

A Friend of the late eighteenth century, Dr. Rutty, records a succession of twenty-two meetings with only one break in the silence.<sup>9</sup> During this period the leaders thought it best to be deliberately silent in order to “starve the people for words” (that is, wean them from), thus teaching them distrust for anything *human*. This attitude indicates the influence on Quakerism of the deteriorated Quietistic strain, which preached the depravity and worthlessness of man and his utter dependence on God. While it was perhaps a natural reaction against the polemics, sectarianism and upheavals of those years, it also served to cloak barrenness. The Friends rationalized the ebbing of the tide as a necessary discipline—as much an act of God as famine and drought.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the ill-effects

of the misuse of silent worship were becoming evident to the thinkers in their midst. John Rowntree was among the first to challenge it, contending that the Quakers had allowed silence to become a form, and moreover an empty form.

Another Quaker who had a vitalizing effect upon the movement was Caroline Stephen of England, late in the nineteenth century. Her experience and writings helped the Friends realize the potential wealth inherent in their faith. Under her inspiration their silent worship again became a living force, no longer passive and unproductive.

The practice of silence remained the primary, but not the exclusive feature of this sect. The strength derived from it was increasingly turned outward. Its expression became more social and humanitarian. The history of Quakerism from that time on to the present day is the application to living, to visible act, of the deep sense of brotherhood with which this sect is imbued. Although mysticism, with its emphasis on "the light within," continues to be a vital strain, the Friends are chiefly concerned today with putting their religion into practice by grappling with the social problems of the day. They strive to externalize the inner harvest they reap in silence by aiding the distressed of all nations and creeds without distinction.

In Quaker worship, then, silence fills a double rôle. It is firstly the appropriate setting, out of which reverential expressions arise spontaneously, building up in the group a characteristic expectancy, a receptivity to that which the Quakers hail as spiritual reality. Secondly, it is in itself a form of expression, a way of saying that which cannot otherwise be said. It clears the way to "com-

munion with God," helping profounder realizations to break through to the consciousness of the worshiper.

It is Quaker practice today, as of old, to gather at meeting and sit silently until someone, "moved by the spirit," feels the urge to speak. As a general rule, there are no aids to worship, such as hymns, scriptural readings, etc., although some few meetings have music during the early part of the meeting. There are no ministers, whose function it is to interpret scripture, the nearest approach to a ministry being what is known as "recorded ministers"—members who have gained some prominence because of their greater degree of openness to inspiration. Anything which tends to block the flow of elevated thought set free by "wise passiveness" continues to be shunned.

The use of silence in this tradition extends even to the custom of "saying grace" at meals. They do not "say grace"; their equivalent for it is a silent pause before the repast. This is another indication of their attitude toward outer forms. They view these as appurtenances which prevent people from recognizing, and hence contending with, their own inner states of poverty.

The positive achievements, as the Quaker sees them, in the direction of spiritual riches, accruing to the individual through silence are epitomized by Joan Fry in these words,

Gradually, as mind, soul and even body grow still, . . . the pettiness, the tangles, the failures of the outer life begin to be seen in their true proportions, and the sense of the Divine infilling, uplifting, redeeming Love becomes real and illuminating. Things are seen and known that are hidden to the ordinary faculties. This state is not merely one of quiescence; the soul is active, alive, vigorous, yet so still that it hardly knows how intense is its own vital action.<sup>10</sup>

In the Quaker ideal, silence becomes not only a sacred language but also a practical one, translatable into attitude and deed.

Partly no doubt inspired by the Quaker influence, there is an interesting development among other divisions of the Protestant Church toward wider adoption of the practice of silence as a means of revitalizing organized religion.

It is being increasingly recognized that religion *as an experience* needs to be recaptured, and that in no other way can it meet the human need. Those who envisage for the Church a more spiritual rôle in modern society look to the instructed use of silence as an aid toward this fulfillment. Some are frank to say that most of the functions of the Church today—educational, social, charitable—are better provided by community agencies, and that unless the Church serves once more its true purpose, the nurture of spiritual growth, it will wane into insignificance.

These friendly critics are aware of the possible dangers attending any general practice of silence. Its frequent abuse in the East, as has been noted, has alienated the sympathy of large sections of the Western world; but those who are taking the trouble to re-examine, feel that values have been overlooked and that the West, in its practicality rejecting the use of silence, has inadvertently “thrown out the baby with the bath water.”

¶ There are or lately were actually several distinctive, if not prominent, modern church movements in England, pre-Nazi Germany and France—at least before its recent débâcle—which revolve around the technique of silent worship. Their central purpose is to retrieve for the communicant the genuine sense of individual participation. In the Church of England, the movement, known as “The

Fellowship of Silence," is closely allied to the informal strain of individual worship expressed in Quakerism. In a section of the Protestant Church in Germany and France the movement is (or was), expressed in certain innovations in the services, designed to make more direct and personal participation in the sacrament.

These changes, it is claimed, give the individual the opportunity to make, through personal experience, his bridge from the immediate reality to the remote ideal. They strive to widen the scope of contact with religion from one limited to cold type in scripture, and the exposition of priests, to an extension of consciousness, to new and vital exploration. The reformers believe that such adventures and discoveries are open to modern man, under modern conditions, and that they are more likely to lead to beneficial activity than patient and passionate exhortation has succeeded in producing.

In Germany the leader of this movement was the late Professor Rudolf Otto, a noted theologian of the University of Marburg, who deliberately followed Quaker methods in the type of church service he sponsored. He regretted that the values of silent worship had been generally neglected in Protestantism and strongly urged the adoption of this form. His innovations found some, though limited, response in the Lutheran Church.

Professor Otto's study of the subject of Silence resulted in his distinguishing three separate forms or stages, culminating in a genuine taste of religion as an experience. The terms he used for these in his church service are (1) the silence of waiting; (2) the Silence of Union or Fellowship; and (3) the numinous Silence of Sacrament.<sup>11</sup> The first aims at the subsidence of activity in the congregation, the withdrawal of attention from outer concerns

and distractions. It has the value of preparing the soul to become receptive. The second, that of Union or Communion, signifies the approach by the individual to "the larger." These two earlier stages of silence prepare for the third—that profound Silence in the presence of God suggested in the Old Testament. The church service preceding this last degree Professor Otto looked upon as a preparation, for that which was previously implied and longed for becomes with the crisis-like moment a vibrant actuality.

"The Sacrament of Silence is to be a single, climactic experience at the close of the worship period, toward which all else in the worship hour shall move. It is to be that supreme moment in the service when the 'Wholly Other' shall invade the presence of the worshippers, bringing them the experience of mystery, awe and beatitude."<sup>12</sup>

Innovations similar to those inaugurated by Professor Otto have been proposed by the French theologian, Professor Robert Will, of the University of Strassbourg. They also have the practice of silence as their distinctive feature. That practice is equally valued but differently placed than in Professor Otto's order of worship. Professor Otto placed the Sacrament of Silence at the end, as the culminating point in the service. Professor Will considers its right place to be in the middle of the service. He believes this order of service facilitates the transition from the sacred silence devoted to the contemplation of Deity back to the mundane. In a three-volume work, *Le Culte*, published in 1925, Professor Will develops his philosophy of worship. In it he agrees with Professor Otto in acknowledging the lack of the intensely contemplative mood in Protestantism, and works through

his suggestions for helping to create it through the wise use of silence.

First theory, then practice was the procedure followed in introducing the use of silence in Germany and France. A reversal of this order—namely, first an arresting experience, then the theory worked out and incorporated into the church service—took place in an Anglican church in New Zealand. From there the practice spread into many churches in England.

In 1915 the Reverend Cyril Hepher, a missionary from England who had been sent to a parish in New Zealand, arrived at a time when a “quiet meeting” was under way—a Quaker meeting that happened to be held in the vestry room of an Anglican church. Although shocked at this strange proceeding, he participated in the silent worship. The experience became so full of meaning, so rich and dynamic that he was forced to ponder it. Later, upon his return to England, he devoted his efforts, literary and oral, to making more widely known in his church of rigid customs the fruits he believed were to be garnered from the use of silence. From this beginning there grew the movement now known as “The Fellowship of Silence.”

It was into the midst of a motley group—Quakers, Anglicans, and several of no church affiliation, that the English minister happened to arrive when he had his New Zealand experience. Much to his surprise he could sense that they were strongly united in silent prayer.

The realization that came upon him then was that essentially prayer is one; that it is only its expression in the tongue of men that is diverse and has been the cause of schism. Deeply moved by the vibrancy of the muted atmosphere—“a still silence living with the sense

of God, there was powerfully present the atmosphere of the Other World”<sup>13</sup>—religion became an electric experience to him. It became something with a substance of its own, to be felt, heard, seen, touched, though not with the physical senses; and apprehended and appreciated by the higher reaches of the mind.

The words of the Reverend Cyril Hepher describe his religious experience thus, though he calls these words far too inadequate to convey his feelings:

First there came very quietly the sense of a Presence. The work of prayer grew strangely easy. We were not resolutely fixing our thoughts upon a Friend in a far country; we were listening to One Who was there in the church—speaking. The still air seemed to vibrate with this Presence that could be felt. God was speaking to us not in words, or voices, but in that speech which does not need to be uttered.<sup>14</sup>

The ease with which differences were submerged for the sake of that which is behind them, the element of fellowship, the power of such Silence to banish the curse of Babel—these were the strengths realized from the New Zealand incident. They were realizations born of experience, not evolved out of theory.

This introduction of silence into the Anglican Church is an addition to other forms of service, not a substitution for them. The opportunity for “quiet meeting” is offered once a week to those who wish to participate in this form of fellowship, but it is by no means as important a factor here as is its purposeful introduction into the order of services in Germany and France. There, as in England also, the wise use of silence is perceived as filling a deep human need, and as a means of counteracting the spiritual poverty resulting from formalism.

The problems arising from the absence or infrequency

of the religious experience are also recognized in this country, although there has been no such organized attempt to meet them as in Europe. There has, however, been dissatisfaction and even much open protest. Commenting on the appalling mediocrity of public prayer in this country, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick says that such as there is, is not prayer in its most inward, intimate and genuine sense. He maintains that only the unspoken outreach of the individual heart is, in the profoundest significance of the word, prayer. Public prayer, as he sees it, "is only the portico inviting the individual spirit to enter the secret sanctuary where, dealing with its solitariness, it prays indeed."<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Frederic S. Fleming of Trinity Church, New York, has also strongly condemned from the pulpit and in the press, the aridity of public worship in this country. His suggestions for meeting this problem are mentioned in a later chapter.

Professor Otto and the other leaders referred to, are radical in their thought only in their eagerness to probe to roots. They understand the difficulties with which the Church has had to contend—that the establishment of organized forms, for instance, was essential to the survival of Christianity, even if because of them the spirit of the movement inevitably suffered. The individual became further and further separated from the vital core of religion. But, they maintain, the lack of participation which has crept in is superficial, and underneath it, they believe, is to be found the stream of life and of living communion, ready and eager to again make contact with potent reality.

The introduction of periods of Silence into church services, to the end of recapturing the living spirit of

religion, strikes out in the direction of the universal, the abstract, the ideal, the cosmic. Thus the Church's sacraments seek to provide an "immediacy" which the individual in his ordinary environment could not easily attain.

A modern cult which makes prominent use of silence in its work is Buchmanism, generally known as the Oxford Group Movement. This movement attempts to restore the freshness of spirit of first-century Christianity.

Members are urged to devote some time daily, in the early morning, to what is known as "the quiet time." It is during this period that they patiently await "God-control," that is, the direction which shall arise out of this quietude to guide their actions for the day. They thus make a sincere effort to place their lives under a control from beyond human levels.

Well-intentioned as these efforts undoubtedly are, it is difficult to know how the group members avoid mistaking promptings from the unconscious for "God-control." It takes much training, about which something will be said later, to know when the ego is not being misled, subtly deceived, into following personal wishes, enticed by self-delusion. The ability to sift out the illusory in the search for reality is developed only with effort and much practice. It takes more than good intentions to escape the snares. Knowledge also is necessary, and the two combined make for the safest traveling through the "jungle."

In giving Silence a definite place in rituals or tenets, the further danger is that this, like many another practice, may become an empty gesture. Fortunately, however, there are criteria for judging, and standards attainable under proper conditions. Before these can be applied the recognition of the value of silence brings with it the

knotty problem of steering a course between the unchecked vagaries of the individual search for a "path to God" and the limitation resulting from formalism. The challenge is to both theologian and individual worshipper.<sup>16</sup> Individual participation in religious experience, but within the bounds and guidance of the Church, is the solution of the conflict toward which at least some modern church movements would seem to be pointing. An analysis of this problem of conflicting interests as between the individual and the institution is undertaken in a later chapter.

The religious type of silence is individual in effect, even when practiced in groups. While no one except the participant knows what goes on during the periods of silence, whether a part of scheduled ritual or not, the communicant is supposed to be using them constructively. When Silence is practiced by members of religious or philosophical groups, it is often hedged about with disciplines and conditions with this end in view. As the same discipline does not hold for periods of silence in the church service, it is probable that these often degenerate into opportunities for mere idle fantasy and it is this danger which is at the root of the opposition of many churchmen to the "moratorium on preaching"—Dr. Fleming's colorful phrase for the temporary omission of sermons he recommends—referred to subsequently. The opposition of the Catholic Church to any but a well-supervised use of silence is probably due to this danger of misuse, the inference being that "Satan finds much for idle hands (or minds) to do."

It is clear that the group uses of silence cannot be classified under one head. They include many grades, many degrees of completeness and effectiveness. Indeed,

degrees must also be taken into account even within the guarded practice of silence of the cloistered religious orders. Among monks and nuns there are no doubt many individuals who put it to negative use, preserving only the outward appearance rather than the inward content. This is especially true among the more secular orders, still in somewhat close touch with the world, active in many of its pursuits, and, therefore, under greater constraint to its attractions. In these cases, the interests which should be under control are often still rampant, although inhibited so far as outward expression is concerned. Here the psychology of the unconscious has much light to shed. Such states may represent actually the absence of real silence—even an inward noisiness.

The tendency of the imagination to surrender to past and present stimuli in the world of sense, the difficulty of controlling the restless surge of the emotions, and the waywardness of thought activity in centering about mundane problems—all these obstacles have to be overcome, not only for a few minutes, but for fairly long periods of time, if the more advanced stages of religious silence are to be reached. It is small wonder that the degrees of attainment differ so greatly; small wonder that relatively few reach beyond the earlier stages, or are able to sustain the high condition for any length of time.

These difficulties were well known to ancient religious leaders, and account, in part at least, for the severe preliminary testings of candidates for admission to their orders. The Pythagoreans were apparently well aware, as were the Sufis and Trappists of a later day—to mention only a few of the groups concerned with the more exigent uses of silence—that only those aspirants capable of a high degree of self-discipline would be successful in the

practice. The demands of these groups, as well as of modern Quakerism, were not and are not satisfied with mere *repression*. Their use of the withdrawn or ingathered energy involves rather the process of *compression*, of self-containment and re-direction on a higher level.

The religious practice of silence, then, both as part of a ritual and for individual development, is deliberate and purposeful, and so differs in an important respect from the popular use. The purpose is two-fold: first, to detach the attention and the life from outer stimuli, and second, to focus them upon inward promptings and spiritual awakening. In the more advanced and ideal forms, a high order of self-discipline, concentration and devotion are necessary. Only with the fulfillment of these basic conditions are the fruits or goals of the process—that is, mystical experience, to be won. Whether the particular goal sought is “communion with Deity,” increased enlightenment, spiritual refreshment, or inward transformation, the practice of silence in its successive degrees of perfection is only a preliminary—but it is an indispensable means to the end.

To the more penetrating mind, the distinctions between the immature and the mature application of silence become apparent. There have been, of course, abuses of silence even in religious orders. Sometimes the practice is judged by these malpractices. This is unfortunate, for such a view artificially sets up limits to what is actually a rich, extensive field for investigation, and has caused indifference and even thrown discredit upon that field. The unproductive use of silence—its use as a cloak for weakness or evasion—should be seen as an indication of immaturity. A fair amount of experience is

necessary for judicious appraisal—experience particularly with the fruits of the practice—of which more later.

In agreement with the Pythagoreans and the Jesuits, among others, modern religionists of experience recognize that mental as well as emotional maturity is required in the practice of the higher grades of silence. Without emotional stability, self-discipline becomes too difficult to attain and maintain; without mental stature, there is always danger of confused imagery and lawless concepts, which the religious thinker avers have nothing whatever to do with genuine mystical experience. Among the Quakers, even though silent worship is the core of their religion, attention is drawn to the fact that its practice is not for everyone. One of the foremost Quaker leaders of the nineteenth century, John Rowntree, warned that silence brings spiritual refreshment only to mature worshipers. He urged against its use by the young and inexperienced.

So there is an element of exclusiveness in the practice of silence in its higher meanings. And with the recognition of this we have come a considerable distance from the general, public, untrained, spontaneous exercise of silence.

## CHAPTER IV

### SILENCE AS A SELF-DISCIPLINE

Silence as a disciplinary measure, a technique for gaining self-control, was at one time the most familiar aspect of the subject. Closely associated with it was the idea of asceticism. That was in the Middle Ages, in the heyday of the Church, when the monastic life was popular.

Today the practice of silence is probably more popular than was formerly the call to the religious life, but the disciplinary aspect has faded out, and of the ascetic little is left, in the West at least, outside a few religious orders. The thousands who go into chapels, churches and places of retreat do so largely to recover themselves in times of stress, to mull and brood at one remove from the clamor of the crowd, and, most enticing to increased multitudes, to "meditate."

The quotes mean merely that there is a wide variety of meaning attached to the word. Not all that goes by the name can possibly be the veridical exercise. There are values, to be sure, even in many of the less complete accomplishments, and more will be said of these later. But for those who practice meditation in its more ultimate, really religious form, the ability to maintain silence over long periods, and with its more exacting requirements, is one they have achieved long ago.

All of which suggests asceticism again, after all. And from that the West shies away, however much it may pay homage to the Swamis who are supposed to have prac-

ticed it in some distant desert. One such, who had a coast-to-coast following in the United States a few years ago, claimed he had not said a word in thirteen years. Fundamentally the West, with its interest in science and in improved conditions of material life, is repelled by asceticism *per se*, even as a prescription for attaining the most fabulous ends.

Hence silence as a discipline arouses antagonism in the vast majority of Occidentals, however eagerly they may flock to "meditation" for relief from pressure and for aspirational reasons.

In view of the positive achievements accompanying the correct use of silence as a discipline, the prejudice should be removed. Not that we need to sanction the extreme measures of Eastern asceticism, which are probably not suited to the Western temperament. We should first distinguish the disciplinary use of silence in general from such use by any particular set of individuals; and second, we might take another look at the whole question of asceticism.

We are aided to a positive understanding of the term "ascetic" by its root meaning. It is derived from the Greek word meaning the training of an athlete. The necessity of physical training for an athlete, or of vocational training for a profession, is obvious to the Western mind. When we consider fields other than the physical and the social, we are confronted with the same need for training. When voluntarily assumed discipline is directed toward spiritual goals, aspirants become spiritual athletes—ascetics in the real sense.

Advancement in the field of spiritual endeavor has always implied labor on, and with, the lower—sometimes baser—side of human nature. Many who have striven

toward such a difficult goal, and related ones, did not fully understand it and hence have so distorted the use of silence as to make of themselves the pseudo-ascetic—thin-lipped and repressed. But the misuse of any practice cannot destroy its genuine meaning. It should be recalled that wise leaders imposed the disciplinary use of silence upon themselves and their followers to aid in the conquest of the undesirable elements in their natures. But it is only, as we shall see, when these ascetic labors are undertaken in the sense of training, as implied in the root of the word, that spiritual advancement takes place.

As a preliminary discipline in preparation for spiritual experience, Silence has been practiced by individuals and groups down the ages. In all times and in all lands it has been regarded by participants as indispensable to the seeker of religious goals. Different degrees have prevailed, according to the desired ends and purposes. It is in the silent orders of monasticism, even to the present day, that we find the more energetic or extreme forms of the practice.

All those who have had religious experience and have been guides to others aspiring to similar goals, uniformly recommend, indeed demand, under penalty of failure, the disciplinary practice of silence. On the other hand, probably no rule for spiritual advancement has been more inveighed against.

Ignorance and misuse have without doubt resulted in abnormalities, perhaps as various and distressing as the skeptics contend. The need for instruction in handling a tool at once as delicate and as potent as silence can become, in its more extended applications, was not always understood. Nor were the instructors all qualified. The menace of false and personal imagination was, and is,

constant, unless it has been minimized in long and well-directed training. But when this and more is admitted, we have in no sense discredited the valid practice. We have merely pointed to the need for discrimination, which holds as well for the use of all other potentially beneficial agencies.

The disciplinary value of silence is primarily its aid in keeping the lower nature in check, so as to release the higher nature to "communion with the Deity." Recognition that an unguarded tongue, turbulent emotions and disordered thoughts dissipate the life force and render the individual incapable of prayer, calls for silence as a preliminary discipline. Mere physical silence, the refraining from speech without higher purpose, is not enough, though it will serve as an introduction. To go no further would be to indulge in that "idle silence" which St. Ambrose so strongly condemns. Hence it is to be readily understood why all founders of religious orders have insisted upon the practice of silence, more or less severely according to the nature of the order, and its purpose, as one of the essential rules of their institutions. The prudent among them, moreover, have zealously supervised the practice and have hedged it about with safeguards and checks to encourage the valid aspects and eliminate the invalid.

The basic purpose of the discipline of silence is to conserve the constructive energies of the individual and keep them from being dissipated on fleeting pleasures. The power so harnessed becomes available to purposes as high as the mind may select. This is known as the release of the higher nature; also as the transformation of the lower nature. The process may be seen as analogous, on

the psychic level, to the conservation and transformation of energy on the physical.

It is not only among the Christian monastic orders that a high place was given to the discipline of silence. The same was true in some of the pre-Christian orders. As already indicated, it held an important place among the Pythagoreans, as well as among such ancient religious and philosophic groups as the Essenes and the Therapeuts.

In the work of Pythagoras, silence was not only a device to keep out the unworthy, but was also bound up with the central purpose of the order. He did not receive into the number of his associates all those who wished to join him.<sup>1</sup> He recognized that more than the desire for inner growth was needed, namely the capacity to undergo the concomitant disciplines. Without that quality the desire could not be transformed into an actuality. He therefore observed the applicant long and carefully before admission. Iamblichus tells us, "He surveyed their unseasonable laughter, their silence and their speaking when it was not proper"<sup>2</sup>—an indication of the significance attached to silence from the very beginning. From the candidate's mode of conduct, Pythagoras could judge his ability to subjugate his tongue—a mere preliminary at this training center, but essential before undertaking more earnest tasks.

The control of speech was far more rigorously put to the test in the next stage of discipline—a five-year period of silence, during which the candidate listened and absorbed the teachings, but said nothing. "He enjoined upon his followers continence of speech and perfect silence," Iamblichus goes on to recount, "exercising them for many years in the subjugation of the tongue, and in

a strenuous and assiduous investigation and resumption of the most difficult theorems. . . . He ordered those who came, to observe a quinquennial silence, in order that he might experimentally know how they were affected as to continence of speech, the subjugation of the tongue being the most difficult of all victories.”<sup>3</sup>

Such a discipline was deemed as insuring the acquisition of insight—the “sight into” causes, or realities behind phenomena. It was this road to spiritual growth and enlightenment the candidate had avowed his desire to travel. Pythagoras accepted none for the journey without the necessary equipment.

Here, too, as in the Mystery traditions, we find many references to the use of silence to guard the inner secrets of the School—to keep sacred things from popular defilement. It was known from long experience that much was revealed to the well-trained seeker, as the process of inner transformation advanced. To bruit it about might have caused injury to the individual and the School, through misunderstanding, and to the unqualified listener through his lack of preparation.

Those who committed themselves to the guidance of Pythagoras’ doctrines were instructed to take their morning walks alone, and in places conducive to solitude and quiet. They were not to break their silence until they “had rendered their own soul sedate and had co-harmonized the reasoning power, for they apprehended it to be a thing of a turbulent nature to mingle in a crowd as soon as they rose from bed.”<sup>4</sup>

We find instances of this early morning self-integrating silence in many other religious and philosophic communities, including the Essenes, Therapeuts and Has-sidim. It served to set the key rightly for the day and to

orient the seeker anew to his high purpose in life. Thus fortified through the ingathering of energies and their deliberate re-dedication, he could pass through the day uncontaminated by whatever it had to offer.

Philo, the Jewish-Hellenistic philosopher, contemporaneous with Jesus, gives a very interesting account of the life and practices of the Hebraic sect called the Therapeuts, referred to previously, known in the ancient world as healers of the soul as well as of the body. He describes one of their communities in Egypt. The austerity and disciplinary character of the sect's religious practices can be judged from their aim, which was frankly to loosen the seeker of wisdom from the bonds of his lower nature. "Completely lightened of the lust of the senses and sensations," they withdrew to their cells, there to track out truth. Much of their regimen was carried on in solitude and silence.

Among the Essenes, another pre-Christian sect devoted to the religious life and practice, asceticism was the rule of the community. They strove to be so pure as to become temples of what later was called the Holy Spirit, and thus seers and prophets. They rose before dawn, and no word was uttered until they had assembled together and offered prayers for the continuance of revelation. In silence they ate the plainest of food. They studied long and strenuously to discipline the mind toward spiritual understanding and, ultimately, "communion with God." Jesus and John the Baptist are said to have been members of this Hebraic sect.

The ancient Hassidim, still another sect of Judaism which had a deep concern with religion as an individual experience, also spent long hours in profound meditation, to fill their hearts with intense devotion to God before

communing with Him. In later centuries the group became more literary and scholastic in its interests.

The aim of purification, the silent grappling with the self, is also the keynote of the Eastern tradition of monasticism and mysticism. Generally speaking, in every Eastern approach to the interpretation of life—be it Buddhism, Taoism, Yoga, Sufism or any other—the illusory nature of this world is the point of departure. Bound up with this understanding is the keen desire for release from the physical nature, that the mind may become aware of the illusion and thus hasten its contact with more ultimate reality.

Eastern philosophy assumes that the soul is pure intelligence, and is only through the illusion of the senses beguiled to take part in concrete, individualized, materialistic experience. True knowledge or emancipation, according to this viewpoint, consists in apprehension of the self not as an individual but as identical with the Whole, as pure intelligence, all else being extraneous and inimical to that apprehension.

When this knowledge dawns, as actual experience not as theory, it is claimed the illusion of the senses breaks down. They no longer operate as an obstacle, a barrier separating the individual from the innate and essential oneness. He becomes part of it. According to the more advanced understanding in the East of the Oriental view of life, the merging is not an extinction of the self, but rather a powerful expansion into its ideal achievement. This augmentation comes only gradually, if accomplished at all, so say the best of the Eastern teachers, and is always described by them as an integrated and ordered process.

Wherever we find a philosophy of life which negates this world, we must look for many ascetic practices aim-

ing to loosen its hold. Silence to its demands and allurements has an essential part in the process of becoming detached.

Involved in this process are psychological factors, for the most part ignored in the popular use of silence, but vital to the accomplishment of its more ultimate purposes. They have to do with that stilling of the heart and mind, the feelings and the thoughts, of which those speak to whom the practice of silence is more than a physical act. The philosophers in all Eastern traditions instructed their disciples in "wise passiveness," condemned idle and inactive silence, and warned against its dangers—more particularly those of false imagination, that is, imagination colored by the still turbulent sensuous life. To them the crowd practice in its superficiality was less harmful than the ardent but untutored practice of the too eager ascetic.

In the philosophic use of silence, as already indicated, it is always regarded as a means to an end, not an end in itself. This view is exemplified in the East in Taoism and in the Zen sect of Buddhism. Here the purpose of silence is to purify, and the purification in turn is the preparation for spiritual attainment. Obviously neither a casual nor a partially trained practice is in question. The ancient Chinese philosopher, Lâo-Tsze, the founder of Taoism, in common with philosophers of all lands and ages, turned away from the immediate world to the life of reflection and contemplation to find a more real world, characterized by the eternal rather than the temporal. He found the solution of conflict between immediate concerns and real values by way of the inner life, through which he realized what he held to be the supreme principle of his own and of all being.

The followers of the doctrine of Tao (The Way) as the

unitary principle of all reality, were not, however, ascetics in the popular sense. Lâo-Tsze enjoined them not to despise the body, but rather to make of it a healthy vehicle, that it might the better serve purposes higher than the physical. Though they did not withdraw from the practical life of the world, they were contemplatives, in that they believed that intellectual development and ratiocination were hindrances to spiritual development. True knowledge, they held, could be attained only by the realization of the self in the stillness of peace. "See nothing, hear nothing; let your soul be wrapped in quiet and your body will begin to take proper form. Let there be absolute repose and absolute purity."<sup>5</sup>

There is, however, no doctrine of negative quietism in Tao. While outer silence and inaction are urged, inner activity is stressed. "Unless there is a suitable endowment within, Tao will not abide. Unless there is outward correctness, Tao will not operate."<sup>6</sup> And to the cultivation of this inner endowment, work on the self in solitude and silence was regarded as essential.

To the Taoists, whose philosophy is based on the transcendent and yet immanent reality of Tao, life as it is ordinarily lived, is but a dream. The personality was not the true man for them. To achieve the Way, man must die to the world as he has previously regarded it, and become alive to a consciousness of its true nature. The death to the less worthy is accompanied by the birth of the more worthy. Disciplined seekers, according to Taoism, become superior people. "Those whose hearts are in a state of repose give forth divine radiance, by the light of which they see themselves as they are, and only by cultivating such repose can man obtain to the constant. Those who are constant are sought after by man

and assisted by God.”<sup>7</sup> To the Taoist the only type of silence meriting the efforts of the wise man is one reaching back to the roots of being from which, he maintains, all is derived.

Taoism constantly stresses that silence to the deceptive and illusory values of the outer world will release the seeker to the realization of the natural harmony of the universe and the fundamental oneness joining man and the cosmos. The disciplinary use of silence is thus, in this tradition, an outer and preliminary step to a higher type of consciousness than is attainable amidst outer confusion. But the results of the inward process were to show themselves in outer living, if the aspirant was undergoing that process validly. The environment was meant to partake, indirectly, of what the Taoist had gained through his inner development. Balance of this kind is not characteristic of the Eastern practice in general, but is true of the more philosophic groups.

A strictly empirical approach to religion motivates that branch of Buddhism known as the Zen sect. The term “Zen” is the Japanese form of the Chinese “Ch’an,” an abbreviation of Zenna or Ch’anna. This is the Chinese rendering of Dhyana, a Sanskrit word, whose nearest English equivalent is *meditation*. The Zen sect was introduced into China early in the sixth century by a missionary from India known as Bodhidharma, and still flourishes today both in China and Japan.

In all approaches to religion, Eastern or Western, in which the religious experience itself constitutes both core and apex, the disciplinary aspect of silence predominates. No less so in Zen. Zen is devoid of specified rituals and ceremonies, the usual impediments of organized worship being foreign to it. It is based on the central

tenet of all mysticism—the oneness of life and the inward, subjective, as against the outward, objective way to Deity. Zen is in essence the art of “seeing into the nature of one’s own being.”

Dr. Suzuki, the noted Japanese scholar, who has done excellent research work in this religion, presents it in the objective, analytical way that makes an understanding of its methods and values accessible to the Western mind. According to him, Zen liberates the forces stored in each of us, which under ordinary circumstances are cramped and distorted, so that they find no adequate channel for activity.<sup>8</sup> Their release is coincidental with that way of life which aims to unite the individual with the oneness behind all things in the universe.

Characteristic of its sparing use of words, the four maxims of Zen are thus tersely stated:

A special transmission outside the Scriptures;  
No dependence upon words and letters;  
Direct pointing to the soul of man;  
Seeing into one’s nature and the attainment of Buddhahood.<sup>9</sup>

The Zen sect has a more rounded, wholesome view of life than all other Eastern approaches, except perhaps Taoism. Both seek the infinite through the finite. As one of the Zen masters puts it, “Salvation must be sought in the finite itself—there is nothing infinite apart from finite things; if you seek something transcendental that will cut you off from this world of relativity, it is the same thing as the annihilation of yourself.”<sup>10</sup> The finite, that is, the world of things and people, must, according to the doctrines of this tradition, be wisely dealt with, not evaded or held in contempt.

Measured against this comprehensive understanding

of the relativity of the material world, all lesser Eastern philosophies which dismiss this world as illusory must be regarded as immature. While also in Zen the objective world is illusion, it is held to be so only in the *final* analysis. Ultimates are not confused with the immediate, and high practice is reserved for high qualification. The immediate is given its relative place in the scheme of things and utilized as the avenue through which the individual may evolve toward ultimates. Thus Zen does not forfeit reason, where reason serves, by "leaping to goals."

The gradual approach to the great goal of Nirvana, Buddhahood, or Enlightenment, says the Zen sect, is to be achieved only by means of rigorous discipline of the self. The motives of the student must be clean, absolutely selfless. Were he motivated in his search by desire for self-aggrandizement, devilment would be the result of his efforts, and he would find himself in the *cul-de-sac* of ego-inflation. Thus in the silent companionship with his deeper nature, the sincere seeker must learn to discipline and cleanse his motives. A life of purity is a basic requirement of Zen—purity of thought and act. To attain that high stage and such similar ultimates as "absolute" selflessness, is regarded by them, as it is by other wise students of life, as a gradual process and a rigorous one. They do not make the mistake of some modern cults of underestimating its hardships, nor the demands such an aspiration makes on the self.

In all Zen monasteries the discipline is almost military in its severity, in order that strict morality may be insured. The Zen monks divide their time between manual labor on their farms and meditation. They are simple, industrious people, happy and contented—not religious fanatics who seek only that "other world" and blind

themselves to the beauties and values of this. They enjoy life in a reasonable way and do not shrink from contact with other-minded people. Though living in cloisters for the most part, they do not lead cloistered lives, cut off from this "world of vanities." They have learned to keep their orientation toward spiritual goals in the midst of ordinary life, yet serenely detached from that life.

The long periods devoted to spiritual exercise are naturally conducted in silence. They are called "za-zen" and are a practice for the cultivation of the faculty of "intuition." The student meditates on various problems, by means of exercises called "ko-ans," such as "The mind is the great slayer of the Real. Let the disciple slay the slayer," and "What is no-thing-ness: that which is devoid of all differentiation." In the high state of consciousness resulting from intense concentration on such questions, the solution of the paradoxes they involve may come in a flash of insight. The aim of these long and intense periods is to obliterate the demarcation between the thinking, the thinker and the object of thought. Out of the deeps of silence the answers, born of the higher faculty of the mind, once it is freed from analytical confusions, may break through into consciousness.

Aside from the many hours spent daily in silent reflection, abstinence is characteristic of their monastic life. Meals are eaten in silence. Most of the manual labor is conducted in silence. The reason for this severe discipline of the tongue is that the mind is fixed on the spiritual nature of all in which they engage. They meditate upon their tasks, viewing impersonally all things and acts in which they participate. Instead of the usual, "I am eating," "I am enjoying myself," to them it is "There is an eating," "There is enjoyment"—the notion of "I" being

carefully avoided. This impersonal yet close attention to the tasks in hand, requires an atmosphere of quiet. Speech would jar the atmosphere—hence the virtual rejection of words.

Far more familiar to the West is another Eastern way of life, Yoga—a philosophy which also makes extensive and intensive use of silence. This branch of Hinduism, in line with Eastern mysticism in general, seeks the attainment of union between the individual personality and the infinite. The word “Yoga” literally means “to yoke,” “to join,”<sup>11</sup> symbolizing the union between the finite and the infinite, the individual soul (*Atman*) with the “world soul” (*Brahman*). The term *Yoga* is the generic name given to the disciplinary practices of the East for the attainment of supernormal powers through concentration. To the spiritually minded who dedicate their lives to *Yoga*, this concentration is undertaken as a means of bringing about identification of individualized being with Being in general. To the lesser-calibered practitioner, the self-discipline may be undertaken for materialistic reasons, such as the exploitation of, or putting to the use of self-aggrandizement, the increased power it releases.

It is perhaps unnecessary to go far into the broad field of *Yoga* here, inasmuch as there is an extensive literature on it. Suffice it to indicate the similarity of its practices to those of other Eastern groups already mentioned.

The practices of *Yoga* are designed to give opportunity for individual verification of its philosophy. *Yoga* affirms that this verification is a direct experience of the same nature as perception, yet possessing greater validity than reasoning. The ideal for a *Yogin*, akin to that of Oriental philosophy in general, is the removal of ignorance, caused by the illusion of sense, toward obtaining freedom from

"the wheel of rebirth." That which trains toward the realization of the true nature of the self leads ultimately, according to this Eastern tradition, to the release of the soul from the bondage of matter.

Yoga are psychological exercises which aim to move the mind in the direction of super-physical reality—a direction quite different from that of ordinary experience. Its practice entails the arrest of the flow of the sense life, the control of the emotions and thoughts. Most of the exercises toward this far-flung goal must necessarily be individually and silently carried on. Ethical, as well as physical, discipline is involved. Truthfulness, sympathy for the suffering of others, unselfishness, and other qualities indicative of heightened moral stature, must be cultivated during the periods of silent meditation by him who would be a true Yогин. The aspirant is taught that neglect of these qualities impairs the mental balance and tranquillity for which he is setting out. The insistence upon purity of motive and singleness of purpose has already been indicated.

The neophyte is warned against the futility of spasmodic and occasional efforts. It is pointed out to him that vacant moods are in no sense a preparation for that self-possession he must seek. Vacuity is cautioned against as a sign of mental sluggishness, a possible danger inherent in silent practices, which must be guarded against. Inner activity behind outer silence, under the guidance of a trained teacher, and the dedication of the self to spiritual goals, avoid the pitfalls of fantasy and illusion. The extremes to which aspiring pupils have sometimes gone in their ardor and their desire to reach distant goals too quickly are responsible for the ill-repute attaching to the Yoga practice in certain Western minds. True, there

have been such abnormalities as loss of reason and repellent neglect of the body. But to take the part for the whole is unjust and unconstructive. In the genuine practice there is no room for mere flights from reality. Throughout all the epochs of Indian culture we find the highest reverence paid to the true Yogins—as against the so-called ones—who were believed not only to possess a superior faculty by which they could know truth beyond ordinary ken, but also to have saintly qualities and miraculous powers.

A mild form of self-discipline involving the refraining from speech is the day of silence practiced by many Easterners. We are made most familiar with it through the publicity given to Mohandas Gandhi's strict adherence to this self-imposed rule. The difficulty, according to Western opinion, of even this comparatively simple self-restraint, is obvious.

By more fanatic ascetics, in India, abstinence from speech is considered so necessary that they take a vow of complete silence. There are those ardent religious seekers known as *Munis*, or Silent Ones, who take so extreme a vow in order to direct all their physical and mental energy toward spiritual goals. Their desire to negate this world may well be so powerful as to stamp out its attraction. These *Munis* are regarded by many as sages, and are said to have become gifted in prophecy as one result of their severe self-discipline and devotion to high purposes.

Perhaps the most ascetic dedication to the religious life in the Orient, other than among the individuals just referred to, is that practiced by the Sufis. This sect of Mohammedanism engages in extreme self-discipline so as to purify the lower elements in man, and to express

their submission, in entirety, to the Divine Will. Sufis strive to bring every word, deed and thought into harmony with this purpose.

There are several theories accounting for their name. The one favored by most Sufis is that which gives the concept of purity as the root of the word—from the Arabic word “*Safā*,” meaning purity. The Sufi is thus one who through labor on, and with, himself, has become purified from all earthly defilements.

Another theory claims that the name is based on the Arabic word “*sūf*,” meaning wool, “for the woolen raiment is the habit of the prophets and the badge of the saints and the elect, as appears in many traditions and narratives.”<sup>12</sup>

Similar to other Oriental interpretations of life, Sufism believes in the unity of all things in the universe. These Mohammedan adherents to this belief strive to attain absorption into, and union with, Deity, and take extreme measures toward this end. Sometimes they have been known to degenerate into fanaticism. According to the Sufi, in close agreement with Eastern doctrine in general, no barriers exist in reality between the finite and the infinite. Those that seem to exist, separating man from God, are artificial.

The Sufi strives, therefore, to lose his individual consciousness in ecstatic self-abandonment, so as to merge with the One. Such complete negation of the self calls for severe self-discipline to the end of burning out the lower impulses, passions and selfish thoughts. This process, very difficult even for the Easterner, is far more so for the Westerner, who has extroverted his life-force to an extent almost unknown in the East. And so, in passing, it might be mentioned that Eastern disciplines are right for the

Easterner; but the Westerner must harness, control and transform his energy through the use of techniques appropriate to his differently oriented way of life. The attempt to graft Eastern methods on to Western extroversion has often proven abortive.

When comparatively little life-force has been drawn out and related to the environment, that little can, with difficulty, be burned out in the crucible of ardor. This radical achievement oftentimes leads, according to the Sufi, to his having "the knowledge of God" vouchsafed to him in a flash of insight. It is evident that such intensive cultivation of the higher elements of his nature must be undertaken alone and in silence.

Meditation and contemplation are basic concepts of Sufism. The nature of the discipline—physical, moral and mental, imposed on the aspirant, and the extent to which silence aids the discipline—is to be seen in the following passages from Sufi literature:

The eyes must be closed to good and evil, and see only the Vision of God.

The ears must be deaf to pleasure and pain, and hear only the Voice of God.

The lips must be silent in joy or sorrow, and utter only the Name of God.<sup>13</sup>

To the man who is able to control his thoughts all things whatsoever are possible. The only way the Disciple can accomplish this with safety, is to constantly allow his thoughts to rest upon God, and to obtain control of himself by daily withdrawal of his thoughts from anything touching the personal life, and thus communing with his own soul in the silence. Then will he hear the Voice of God, and see with open vision the solution of all life's problems.<sup>14</sup>

To the Sufi the silence of his long periods of meditation is the channel through which he may hear "the voice

of God." He goes through the progressive stages, stilling first the senses, then the call of feelings and thoughts to the outer world. The more advanced he is, the more quickly does he "tune out" from ordinary conditions, and into those he believes he must attain before he can "break through the veil," or melt the barriers, which he insists are self-erected, between man and God.

To the questions "What is God?" and "What is man?" the Sufi answers, "The soul, conscious of its limited existence, is 'man,' and the soul revealed by the vision of the unlimited is 'God.' Plainly speaking, man's self-consciousness is man, and man's consciousness of his highest ideal is God. By communion between these two, in time both become one, as in reality they are already one."<sup>15</sup>

The spiritual exercises (*riyada*) required of a disciple are often very severe, though not all Sufi orders prescribe the same degree of severity. Some priests (*sheikhs*) require fasting and little sleep as a minimum, but not a few add extended periods of silence to this regimen. Sometimes a priest will prescribe the occasional exercise of the Forty Day Retreat (*khalwa*). The disciple is ordered to a tiny cell, which is so small as to permit neither of standing nor lying down. In this tiny, dark enclosure he sits for forty days and nights, coming out only to participate in the spiritual exercises of the monastery.

It is said of the Sufi saint, Abu Sa'id, that he retired into seclusion in the mountains for seven years, maintaining utter silence<sup>16</sup>—an illustration of the lengths sometimes resorted to by the Sufis in their intensity. While such instances are rare, even the usual procedure of the religious life of the Sufi carries with it assiduous labors to achieve the transition sought through his silent

devotional exercises—that from three-dimensional, material consciousness into mystical experience.

The Order of the Trappists may be said to be the counterpart in Christianity of the Zen sect of Buddhism, insofar as the practice of silence forms an integral part of their monastic regime. Their extensive and intensive use of silence is definitely ascetic, and so is related also to Yoga and Sufism. The Trappist Order is probably the most extreme example of corporate discipline in Western monasticism, even in the Western world.

It was in the sixth century that St. Benedict founded the order that bears his name. After years of seclusion in uninhabited mountains, where he went in his endeavor to serve God in the best way he knew, namely by a life of contemplation, he came out of his retreat to head a group of similarly minded religious aspirants. This was the beginning of the Benedictine Order. Subsequently it separated into two sections—the Strict Observance and the Common Observance groups.

During the next five hundred years, even among the monks in the Strict Observance section, laxities in religious practices and gradual deviation from the rules laid down by St. Benedict crept in. This led a small group to break off from the parent stem. Desiring to place upon themselves a more austere regimen, which they regarded as essential to regain the spiritual values inherent in the life taught by St. Benedict some five hundred years before, they set out to establish a house of their own. In 1098 they settled in a most inaccessible, marshy section of France called Citeaux, where they determined to adhere to an exact observance of their original rule.<sup>17</sup> From the name of the locality they derived the name of Cistercians.

For more than two centuries the order showed a steady development and a strict adherence to their purpose. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, however, outer circumstances, diversion from silence, succeeded in weakening the purposes and the severity of the practices. During these centuries the order fell into the same laxities and abuses as did monasticism in general in the later Middle Ages.

Toward the latter part of the seventeenth century a clergyman by the name of Abbé de Rancé received, as a political prize, the headship of the Benedictine Order of Cistercians at a place in France called La Trappe. He had been one of those who had participated heavily in the offices, honors and pleasures common to the nobility of his time. Having found them empty, he turned to the religious life in earnestness and resolved no longer to make a mockery of the office he had received. Against the trend of the times he instituted a series of reforms at his monastery which aimed to recapture the spirit prevailing at Citeaux in the twelfth century. Thus it was that the monastery at La Trappe became the model for monastic reform in general. It is from this monastery that the name of Trappists is derived—a name standing for the restoration of the strict discipline previously synonymous with the name of St. Benedict.

The Trappists are among the very few orders which have endured through the vicissitudes of centuries in unchanged form, adhering scrupulously to St. Benedict's rule down to the present. What distinguishes them from most other orders is their extensive use of silence, in addition to the traditional monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Less philosophic in its trend than the Zen monks' medi-

tation, the Trappists' contemplation is largely of the "heart." It revolves around the love of God, and is sustained through the ardent desire to commune with Him. This being the paramount object of his life, the Trappist's occupations are all subordinated to it and affected by it. His thought is constantly directed to God, even while his hands perform manual labor and other arduous tasks. To maintain steadfastly this supermundane orientation there is needed as perfectly quiet an atmosphere as is humanly possible. It conduces to feeling the unity, rather than the multiplicity, of things.

Silence is rigidly maintained at meals, both as to speech and the sound of dishes. It prevails also while the monks are engaged in their farming. To eliminate the necessity for speech, a language of signs has been evolved for such communication as cannot be eliminated. Thus every care is taken that the still atmosphere be not broken unnecessarily. The monk is, however, always free to speak with his superior, who stands always ready to aid and guide him.

Their vow to refrain from speaking has won for the Trappists the name of the Silent Brotherhood. Three-quarters of their waking hours are devoted to religious practices. Six hours are spent at prayers and masses, two hours are devoted to study and spiritual reading, and two hours to private devotions. Practical pursuits are confined to the minimum. Being an entirely self-dependent community, they do all their own agricultural work, but no more than four hours daily are allotted to fulfilling this world's demands.

Aside from the use of speech to confess his sins and to sing the offices of the Church, the tongue is, for the Trappist, a superfluous member. It is silence that shuts

out worldly topics and controversy—silence that “enables the soul to contemplate with singleness of purpose the infinite perfection of the Eternal.”<sup>18</sup>

The Trappist belief, in common with all monasticism, is that the body is the tenement of flesh, and their disciplines include a diminution of its demands. The drives and impulses of the physical organism they consider impediments to holiness, and their inroads must be kept in control by the practice of austerities. In the view of this order, the sacrifice of the lesser for the larger, the withdrawal of the life-force from pursuit of materialistic values, which evaporate, and its direction to spiritual goals, which they see as enduring everlasting, are the means by which true living is achieved. The aim of their asceticism adheres to the previously mentioned root-meaning of the word—namely, the becoming of spiritual athletes.

Although devoted to solitude, silence and seclusion, they are not misanthropes. On the contrary, writings about them from all over the world emphasize the cheerfulness, contentment and tranquillity observable in their midst. They feel warmly toward their fellowmen and are at all times ready to extend cordial hospitality to those that seek them out. A visitor to the monastery at La Trappe writes:

It is quite impossible that I can do justice to the kind, polite and hospitable reception I have met with by any expression in writing. I can only observe that it has made an impression on my mind never to be effaced. If these worthy and pious people have abandoned the world for the solitude and austerities of La Trappe, they have not forgotten, in their own self-denial, the benevolence and benignity due to strangers.<sup>19</sup>

Comments on the life in all their monasteries, widely separated as they are—in China, Europe and America—stress the same fundamentals of ardent devotion to spiritual concerns, easy acceptance of disciplines, cheerful labor. Records of their longevity, vigor and alertness would seem to indicate no harmful effect of the austerities. The prevalence of silence by no means seems to hamper the expression of their fine and sturdy qualities. In ways far more effective than speech, namely in the quality of their lives, the lofty nature of their objective shines through.

Although it was St. Benedict who laid down the clearest and strictest laws regarding the observance of silence, the practice holds an important place in monastic orders other than the Benedictine. There are contemplative orders, such as the Carthusians, the Carmelites and Camaldolese, who make almost as much of the use of silence as a discipline as do the Trappists. Even in orders devoted mainly to *works* it holds a prominent place—for example, among the Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits. In monasteries of every order there are special places, called “Regular Places” (such as the chapel, the refectory, dormitory, etc.), and special times, notably the night hours, wherein speaking is more or less strictly prohibited. At times and places other than these special ones, conversation is limited to allotted periods of recreation. The ban on useless and idle speech has existed in all orders at all times.

The members of the strictly contemplative orders mentioned often lead practically hermit existences, in spite of their affiliation with a group. Frequently dwelling alone or in pairs, they occupy cells or tiny cottages, detached or semi-detached from the main house. Necessities are

brought from the monasteries. They do not receive visitors and keep almost perpetual silence.

Among the Camaldoleses silence is broken two or three times a week at recreation. Their meals are always taken in the seclusion of the cell, except on the great feast days, when they join the rest of the community, and even then no word is spoken.

A Carthusian monastery consists of a great cloister, around which are built the separate houses or cells of the monks. Their food is passed to them through a hatch in the cell-door. On Sundays they assemble at services and meals, partaken of most frugally and in silence. Once a week the monks take a walk together, during which conversation is permitted. This recalls the practice among the ancient Therapeuts, as recounted by Philo:

For six days on end everyone remains apart in solitude with himself in his "monastery," as it is called, engaged in study, never setting foot out of door, or even looking out of window. But every seventh day they come together as it were to a general assembly.<sup>20</sup>

The monks, not the nuns, of the Carmelite Order participate in outside works, such as preaching and ministering to community needs, more than do the monks of other contemplative orders. Here too, however, a part of the order leads the ascetic life of hermits. Among the Carmelites also a break in the silence is permissible only for necessity and at recreation twice a day.

In the Catholic Church the main object of silence is to render the person most apt for the influx of "actual grace" which consists of divine illumination of the intellect and inspiration of the will. Hence the disciplined use of silence in their religious practices has always been

seen as indispensable means both to the individual independently devoted to the religious life and to the members of monastic orders. The hermits and anchorites, the forerunners of monasticism, have imposed silence upon themselves in order to come to know, and the better to serve, God. It is among these devotees that we are more likely to find the extremes in the practice and results that have from time to time alienated sympathy. But on the whole this group has acquitted itself well.

A specialized disciplinary use of silence is frequent in connection with penance—a use popular among monastics; that is, periods of self-imposed silence beyond those ordinarily required. Such ascetic practice, where it is not undertaken for constructive ends, but as an end in itself, must be classed as a negative use of silence. It may be tainted with puritanism, which shrinks from this world's joys and beauties, because of their very attraction. There is conflict in the psyche, not yet resolved. But the spiritually minded, whether as individuals or as members of orders, have at all times known the positive and constructive uses of asceticism, and especially as regards the practice of silence.

Constructively used, ascetic practices have been the means of purifying the body, which ordinarily and "naturally" tends to dullness and corruption. On the one hand, the physical body is aided to become a better tool for the high purposes to which the individual has dedicated himself, and on the other, its demands are reduced to a minimum, leaving him freer for spiritual endeavors.

We note, finally, that the disciplinary use of silence plays a part in the religious practices of laymen, particularly among the members of the Catholic Church, when they participate in retreats. Inasmuch as a later chapter

is devoted to these periodic withdrawals from practical pursuits for the cultivation and strengthening of the will toward spiritual values, nothing beyond mere mention of them will be made here.

Diversified as are the objectives of silence as a discipline, one function is common to them all. That function is to clear away the obstacles of the lower nature so that they may not bar access to supermundane realizations. The levels of this type of silence run a gamut—considering only those of a positive nature—from the practical, to the ethical, and finally to the spiritual. On the practical level, the discipline of silence has shown itself useful both in holding under control much that later, if expressed, would be regretted, and for “tuning out” of turbulence, away from outer superficialities and dissension, and into peacefulness and quietude. On the ethical level, we have seen its aid toward character development through its promotion of self-control and a cleansing of motives. Its spiritual value lies in its indispensability in opening the way to direct, individual religious experience. In the language of a mystic, this highest service is thus expressed:

That which we most require for spiritual growth is the silence of the desire and of the tongue before God. . . . The language He most listens to is that of silent love.<sup>21</sup>

## CHAPTER V

### SILENCE AS A SOURCE OF HEALING, POWER AND REFRESHMENT

The pages of religious history abound in references to Silence, in the disciplined sense, as a means of healing, bodily and mental. Often the Silence seems to be considered in itself the fountain-head from which pours forth upon the earnest seeker refreshment on life's journey, power for its tasks, and ointment for its wounds. In the more thoughtful writings the practice is seen rather as the bridge or channel to the source than as the source itself.

An outstanding instance of a group practicing silence to the world's demands in order to achieve the power of healing was the religious community of the Therapeuts, referred to in the previous chapter. According to the English scholar Mead's description of them:

They were devoted to the curing of the sick, the healing of both body and soul, and regarded the power to perform miraculous cures as the highest stage of discipline.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it is apparent that the power they sought extended beyond the physical, to spiritual healing.

Indeed, to this, as to other religious groups, the well-being of heart and mind was primary, and that of the body secondary. They believed that physical health was dependent upon a sound condition in the individual's soul, or whatever else they called his incorporeal organism.

They were devoted to the practice of healing the "inner man." Generations of experience had taught them what forces might be released, what resources tapped in the process.

Modern therapeutics is beginning to re-discover the principle involved here. Not that there is conscious application of the wisdom of the ancients, but at almost every medical convention today one hears of ailments that have always been considered entirely somatic, being interpreted in the light of a probably psychic origin. A long list of disorders—not a few of the allergies, many cases of diabetes and arthritis, and even frequently ulcer of the stomach, are now so classified. That is, they are often being acknowledged as functional, rather than organic disorders—functional in cause, but physical in effect. The original cause may be an emotional conflict, for which psychological rather than physical treatment is recommended.<sup>2</sup> But however designated, it is the diseased (dis-eased) psychic or soul condition to which modern science is turning more of its attention. This is the same aspect of the individual to which the Therapeuts directed their efforts. Their work was in the interests of the "higher man." Benefit to the "lower man" and to his vehicle, the body, might accrue, but that was not the main objective.

Before the Therapeuts were permitted to minister to others they were required to heal themselves in the deeps of their own being. No troubled soul, at odds with its self or with its environment, could have endured their life for long, a life which to most of us today might appear to have been ninety-nine percent hard labor, generally in perfect silence, privation of food, shelter and raiment, and all but complete personal sacrifice to the needs of

others and of the community. Probably no human being could have lived for decades just such a life unless he had found compensations in other than material ways. Their continuation in the order, and above all, their characteristic sweetness of disposition and behavior, were unmistakable evidence that they had found this compensation.

Philo has much to say in admiration of the Therapeuts. Not least was he impressed by their serenity, their gentle good cheer, and what today might be called "successful adjustment." How high a state had to be reached before the aspirant was considered qualified to heal is indicated by the fact that this stage was the tenth in a long and arduous progression.

That many of the Therapeuts and of the Essenes, whose religious practices are also commended by Philo and others, possessed effective healing power is attested by the thousands who are reported to have journeyed from far and near to their communities in desert hiding-places, to be cured of ills. The Essenes were as rigorous in their self-discipline as the Therapeuts, though less contemplative.

Wherever among the religious traditions of antiquity the regulated use of silence was a vital element in group life—whether among the Therapeuts, the Essenes, the Mystery religions, or the philosophic groups identified with Pythagoras, the Gnostics and the Neo-Platonists—it was associated with the practice of healing. Whether or not the healing was intended to go beyond the individual members themselves, it always, in these high-calibered groups, exceeded the limits of the physical body.

In addition to its value in healing, the practice of silence was revered as the entrance hall to a new life, the

marshaling of human energies into new and higher channels. Without such direction there could be no great increment of power. Plato refers not only to the increase of his own mental faculties through the right use of silence, but reports that Socrates also was accustomed to sit silently for hours, for the same deliberate purpose. We may be sure that that Silence meant great activity other than physical. Marcus Aurelius advocated the frequent recourse to inner stillness in these words:

Nowhere either with more quiet or with more freedom from trouble does a man retire than into his own soul, particularly when he has within him such thoughts that by looking into them he is immediately in perfect tranquillity; and I affirm that tranquillity is nothing else than good ordering of the mind. Constantly, then, give thyself this retreat and renew thyself.<sup>3</sup>

The release from the shackles of the old, the influx of streams from the new, the vast widening of horizons, are aspects of rebirth, the quest of all the old Mystery traditions. One of these is from ancient Egypt—the Hermetic, so called by the Greeks, through whom it has been transmitted. This old and revered religion says of this state of the Silence to earthly interests, through which the high state may be reached:

Then only will you see the vision when you cannot speak of it, for the knowledge of it is deep silence, and suppression of all the senses.<sup>4</sup> . . . Speak not, but keep solemn silence; so will the mercy come down on us from God.<sup>5</sup>

As Professor Willoughby says of this too little known religious philosophy, there is something almost magical about the way silence figured in the Hermetic process of regeneration.<sup>6</sup> Philo likewise deemed the practice of

silence, in its deepest sense, an essential preliminary to the transforming experience of rebirth and its concomitant expansion of power.<sup>7</sup>

The increase of mental powers to which Plato referred was not merely of the intellectual order or of the reasoning faculty. It was rather in the line of what Bergson now calls intuition, and was claimed as a normal accompaniment of regeneration in its philosophic sense. This extension is described thus by a modern scholar:

Such knowledge was not the result of sense perception and reason. It stood in contrast to them. Rather it was a special mental enlightenment, the gift of God, which freed men from the illusions of sense and gave them insight into reality and the purpose of existence.<sup>8</sup>

¶ Patience, a willingness to wait untiringly and serenely for the inflow of spiritual force, was a *sine qua non* in the aspirant to regeneration. Victory must already have been achieved in the struggle with the senses, with the wishes of the personal self, and with the thoughts and feelings bound up with outer interests. Where silence was undertaken for the achievement of vast goals it had to be commensurately profound in its depth and genuine in its quality.

The ancient practice known as “incubation” or “temple sleep” was widespread throughout the pre-Christian world. It was undertaken for the two-fold purpose of healing and of communion with Deity. Of course, sleep in general might be classified as silence, but the phenomena of the ordinary sleep state are not consciously prepared for as a rule. An examination into them would take us too far afield. So we shall pause here only to consider that phase of incubation which dealt with the conscious,

self-imposed, voluntary silence which preceded the temple sleep itself. Deep and reverent silence was held to be a necessary preliminary to incubation—that type of sleep state which was to yield curative and illuminating experience.

Records such as the Ebers papyrus, dated about 1700 b.c., indicate that the practice of incubation was known throughout the ancient world dominated by Egypt. It was, however, best known in Greece, through the worship of Asclepius, the God of healing. The ancient historian, Strabo, speaks of an incubation center in Egypt, near Alexandria:

At Kanobos is a temple of Serapis which is venerated with deep reverence and which brings to pass cures, so that even the most distinguished men themselves practice incubation or do so through others.

Temple sleep at the Oracle of Amphiarios in ancient Greece is attested in inscriptions at the temple dating from around 400 b.c. According to the rules and regulations recorded in the inscription, the priest who received the suppliant prescribed fasting and silence as part of the rites in order to produce certain states of mind believed to be conducive to healing during the ensuing sleep state.

Asiatic literature, like that of northern Africa and Greece, is replete with instances of the skill in healing among holy men. These frequently became legendary characters, due to the fame of their powers acquired in the course of years of practicing silent meditation. In India some of the great holy men who are said to have completely refrained from speech, are known to have exerted a potent influence upon the lives of their

followers. Performance of deeds beyond ordinary ability, exercise of wisdom beyond ordinary ken, and physical, moral and mental capacities far beyond ordinary scope among these solitaries and hermits form the warp and woof of many a legend from the East.

Wherever there was understanding of progressions in spiritual development, abundant powers, including healing skill, were regarded as attributes of the maturing soul. Such growth, it was held, could take place only when life was indrawn, much as the growth in a plant's root-system takes place in the dark of earth. As the plant's emergence into light and air is an outward manifestation of hidden root-growth, so too are the qualities and powers the visible sign of inward human progress.

In Zen Buddhism it is claimed that the religious experience achieved through disciplined silence releases powers stored within, powers which are ordinarily blocked and hampered in expression by constraint to the outer world and its illusions.<sup>9</sup> The content of the experience culminating in "enlightenment," called the realization of Buddhahood within the self, is said to bring with it the reconstruction of one's entire personality, enriching and energizing it.<sup>10</sup> The tentative quality and uneasiness of intellectual reasoning are said to be replaced by certainty and clarity.<sup>11</sup>

Commenting on the mental prowess achieved by one who has come through personal experience to "enlightenment," Dr. Suzuki explains it thus:

It is not an ordinary intellectual process of reasoning, but a power that will grasp something most fundamental in an instant and in the directest way. Prajna is the name given to this power by the Buddhists, and what Zen Buddhism aims

at in its relation to the doctrine of Enlightenment is to awaken Prajna by the exercise of meditation.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of the Western attitude toward the validity and merit of this mental power, to the Buddhists it is the goal worthy of all sacrifice. Silence to the world as a means to that power is part of a price gladly paid. The expansion of the mental outlook inevitably brings with it disdain for institutionalism and the viewpoints of orthodoxy. Incidentally, there are many evidences that the West has begun to revise its appraisal of the factual reasoning mind and to recognize its limits. Bergson is a prophet of the new appreciation, and his book, *Intellect and Intuition*, brings out many antitheses in the two mental functionings, with the laurels by no means awarded to intellect. (See Chapter IX.)

Taoism is another important tradition of the East which embodies a similar concept of widened and deepened knowledge. Devotion to Tao (The Way), practiced in the quiet which has been achieved within the self, is said to recover the state of "natural integrity," usually snowed under by the conventions and complexities of over-civilized life.<sup>13</sup> "Recovery of inherent faculties" is the expression for the increase of powers gained by the follower of Tao. We are reminded of Plato's doctrine of re-collection, as developed in the *Meno Dialogue*. In Taoism withdrawal from externals and the search within the self are essentials preliminary to the release of latent powers within and, beyond that, the discovery of the supreme principle of one's own and of all being. Peace of mind and serenity characterized the Taoist. These states, universally desired, and treasured even in brief abiding, are considered the norm of existence.

among these devotees of other than worldly satisfactions.

The Taoist believes that devotion to the inner life not only endows him more genuinely with supernormal powers and qualities but does so more quickly than could outer ways. This devotion is also effectual from the social viewpoint, when attention is again directed toward men, and not only toward the good of the individual.

The Tao can resolve customs and change habits by means of merely spiritual influence. How could laws or punishments ever achieve so much? For this reason the sage pays every attention to the culture of the fundamental rather than to the adornment of accidental means (such as the imposition of laws and punishment).<sup>14</sup> . . . To be permeated with the Tao and not subject to vacillation, gives the perfection of repose; not to be loaded with carnal desires gives perfection of *hsu*, purity. . . . When there is no love and no hate, there is the perfection of equanimity. When the mind is not distracted by things, there is the perfection of simplicity.<sup>15</sup>

Note the progression of quietudes in the last phrases—physical, emotional, and mental.

The social benefit resulting from this genuine, penetrating type of silence is, as it were, a radiation outward of the individual benefit. As the individual profits, so also does society. And the social benefit grows in proportion to the number of those individually pursuing "The Way."

Of all the religious and philosophical groups who use Silence, in its larger meaning, as an instrument of their quest, none were fired with a greater passion than the Christian mystics. The mystic of Western tradition, no less than his Eastern brother, is certain he can and does tap hidden powers in the religious experiences he achieves in silence to the world. His utterances refer frequently

to the healing of suffering, not of body but of soul. But the Christian mystic is little concerned with a scrutiny of his experiences, such as distinguishes, for instance, the Taoist philosopher. He seems content rather to experience uncritically, to be transported, to bask in the sunshine of his new-found bliss, humble and grateful that the Lord should have found his devotion acceptable, and given sign of His approval.

The Christian mystic relies upon the experience as his guide to action, because he is so certain of its validity; and usually he does not question its source, its grade, or the influence of the personal equation. His is a devotional approach to religion, and as he is less philosophically and metaphysically minded than some of the Eastern religionists, probing is alien to his nature.

In key with the attitude of Western civilization, the Christian mystic's experience often enhances his outer life. He views this world not as something to be despised. While he may regard it as a temporary abiding place, certainly he does not consider it illusory, as does so often his brother in the East. This world, in spite of his striving beyond it, is for him a potent reality—an expression of God. His mystical experience enriches and expands it. Thus his practice of silence teaches him, first, to put the external world into satisfying relationship with his deeper sensing, and then, as his peace and control grow, to deal with that world more effectively. Not all who enter the cycle beginning with withdrawal remain to complete it—as the world sees completion—in better, more courageous practical living. Many become mere visionaries. But the ideal remains.

Before we look further into the fruits of Western mysticism it might be well to pause at the term in general.

Few terms have suffered so much from vague usage and misunderstanding. The word, as misused, would seem to cover anything "mysterious." It arouses responses varying all the way from opprobrium to awe, and calls forth associations all the way from the crafty fortune-teller to the canonized saint. The discredit attaching to mysticism in certain quarters stems as much from the extravagant statements of its ardent followers as from the impatience or ignorance of its hostile critics. The former have beclouded the issue by emotionalism. The latter have closed the door to understanding this realm of human experience by coming to conclusions on insufficient or incorrect data. To judge so great a field of activity by the emotional outbursts of some, and to exclude the tempered, well-balanced accounts of others, is to mistake the fragment for the statue.

Much of the haze surrounding the subject of mysticism is due to the lack of criteria for evaluating experiences rightly or wrongly associated with it. Subnormal and supernormal are all too frequently lumped together. Yet it is of special importance in any activity involving so many psychological factors to be able to separate the regressive from the progressive, the lead from the gold. Among the pioneers in this mighty task of sifting was the European physician and analyst, Dr. Herbert Silberer.

Because a type of experience deviates from the norm, there is no reason to dismiss it as harmful or destructive. There is just as much possibility that it is beneficent and constructive. What matter if the majority of observations support a negative conclusion? Is there not much more chaff in the world than grain, more coal than diamonds, more muck than clear spring water? Quantitative evidence has never in the long run proven effective against qual-

tative evidence. It is only by studying the constructive aspects of that which is being investigated that its use can be distinguished from its abuse and its ultimate contribution estimated.

Greater and greater differentiation, more and more constructive departure from the norm—this is the path of progressive evolution, of “creative evolution” in Bergson’s terminology. To quote him further:

The evolutionary process manifested in the upward curve of organic life is filled with rational and purposive significance. Increasing complexity is a necessary condition of advance in the realizing of potentialities. . . . If we would know what is normal, we must study departures from the norm; the more deeply will it initiate us into the secret of normality.<sup>16</sup>

A concise and useful definition of mystical experience is that given by Professor Rufus M. Jones:

Mystical experience is consciousness of direct and immediate relationship with some transcendent reality which in the moment of experience is believed to be God.<sup>17</sup>

Though simple, this definition embraces a wide range and contains at least one important criterion of progressive experience—the reference to “transcendent reality.” We may not believe with the mystic that he contacts God as readily as he supposes, but we can grant that he may well experience that which actually transcends his own personality—something, that is, which breaks through the limits of his hopes, fears, wishes, and is not engendered by his thoughts, feelings and sensations. It may be colored by them.

When we consider how difficult it is to overcome the influence of the personality, which is really what the mystic means by the “lower man”—we can well under-

stand why there may be so much of the false and of the distorted connected with the mystic's effort to "put by the world." Silence to worldly allurements is recognized as first aid to even the earlier degrees of this liberation from the personality. To achieve this liberation as fully as is humanly possible is Silence in its deepest meaning.

None have understood better than the maturer students and followers of mysticism the harm done themselves and others by the extravagance and fanaticism of the less mature. The greater the mystic, the more keenly is he aware of the dangers and pitfalls confronting the eager, though oftentimes ignorant, seeker after mystical experience. Down the ages he has warned, urged and instructed the aspirant against the subtle intrusions of the "lower man," the allurements and betrayals of imagination, the retribution to the mere seeker of escape from the stern demands of a life of rectitude in the outer world. But again, because the immature, however well intentioned, have often been victims of their "unpurified" imaginations and of hallucinations, there is no valid reason for refusing to weigh the findings of those who have successfully passed through the negative, self-deluding stage and have come out into wholesome, constructive clarity and peace.

Discussing the attitude of great mystics themselves toward possible dangers, Bergson says:

They have been the first to warn their disciples against visions which are likely to be pure hallucinations. And they regarded their own visions, when they had any, as of secondary importance, as wayside incidents; they had had to go beyond them, leaving raptures and ecstasy far behind, to reach the goal, which was identification of the human will with the divine will.<sup>18</sup>

What is needed is more observation, not less; more direct, first-hand study, not reliance merely on second-hand reports. Or at least more scientific comparison of those reports, along the lines on which Silberer has been working. Surely the inspiration of a St. Francis of Assisi or a Spanish St. Theresa, the inspiration that sustained them, despite overwhelming odds, in lives of activity, beneficence and enormous influence, deserve thoughtful examination. If these eminent figures and thousands of others of strong intellect, not weak, have found in their transcendent experience a source of enhanced vitality and effectiveness, are we to evade responsibility for critical study by a mere sentimental appreciation, an impatient rejection, or a gesture of despair at the magnitude of the task? How far would we have attained in the application of *physical* extensions of human power had we permitted obstacles or complications to frustrate our search for scientific laws? How much would we have learned of the intelligent handling of dynamite had we shied off because of ever present dangers? Had we not persisted, there would be no tunneling through mountains, no Boulder Dam, no Tennessee Valley electrification. Had medical inquiry been governed by the same timidity and skepticism which characterize the attitude of many otherwise intelligent minds toward the whole subject of mysticism, there would have been no Pasteurs, no Listers, no Ehrlichs.

Professor Rufus M. Jones gives a comprehensive idea of the wide range of mystical experience in these words:

There are many different degrees of intensity, concentration and conviction in the experiences of different individual mystics, and also in the various experiences of the same individual from time to time. There has been a tendency in most

studies of mysticism to regard the state of ecstasy as par excellence mystical experience. That is, however, a grave mistake. The calmer, more meditative, less emotional, less ecstatic experiences of God are not less convincing and possess greater constructive value for life and character, than do ecstatic experience.<sup>19</sup>

So here is another complication—gradation of merit within the valid. And to this must be added a certain intangibility and often an ineffability in the experience itself. The literal, scientific mind really has some excuse for its aloofness.

Those who have been enriched by mystical experience have often been aware of the vagueness of their reports, but have maintained that blurred edges are unavoidable. Try as they might to convey the essence of their experience to others, they have all regretfully conceded their failure, and have ascribed it to an intrinsic "unsharability." Their plight can perhaps best be appreciated when one tries to convey the beauty of a flower to him who has never seen one, the sweetness of a perfume to him who has never smelted it, the moving quality of a piece of music to him who has never heard it. Regardless of the reporter's competence, the essence of the experience inevitably remains hidden, subjective, private, non-transmissible. The mystic says he can no more do justice to the experience in his description than a vessel can hold the content of the ocean.

Justifiably, however, Professor Charles Bennett of Yale, in his excellent work on the philosophy of mysticism, takes to task the mystic who is reluctant to formulate his experience. He says:

The mystic maintains that the attempt to translate any significant experience into ideas and language always falsifies

and impoverishes it. This judgment is neither just nor wise, implying as it does, that true knowledge ends in silence. Any achievement in expression is so much sheer gain. It would be fairer to say that expression omits elements of the original, thus leaving open the possibility that the omission in time may be made good.<sup>20</sup>

Repeated effort to bring more and more of the experience to the surface helps the non-participant to understand and appreciate. This is the direction in which he who has experienced mystically must labor if he would convince others of the validity of his experience. Unfortunately he is seldom so minded. He is too eager to "arrive," to map out for others the stages of his journey; too busy with his adventure to probe into the laws behind it.

Evelyn Underhill, a recognized authority on mysticism, maintains that the experience to which silence aids the mystic is an organic life-process. By this she means an expansion at the roots of his being. Such a process tends differently from intellectual growth, which all too often develops the reasoning faculty but leaves deeper sensibilities immature, and often even infantile. She maintains, and furnishes ample evidence, that through genuine mystical experience larger worlds are made accessible than through ordinary ways of living. She describes mysticism as a means to enhance life; not so much an overwhelming adventure as an ordered movement toward higher levels of reality. A definite and arduous psychological process is involved, though it may not necessarily be conscious in all respects.<sup>21</sup> Speaking of the expansions on different levels of being often experienced by mystics, she says:

Under the spur of their vivid faculty of intuition they gather up all their being and thrust it forward—the whole person-

ality, not its sharp intellectual tip alone—on a new, free path. Hence it is that they live and move in worlds to us unrealized; see other aspects of the many-leveled, many-colored world of Reality. Living with an “intensity” which is beyond that of the “normal” men, deeper and deeper layers of existence are revealed to them.<sup>22</sup>

The object here is not to examine into the general subject of mysticism but rather, from the fragments of testimony, to suggest something of the expanded powers in those who cultivate the field. Those who have never had mystical experience may lack sensibility for non-material values. Or they may merely have blunted it. If so, a change of attitude may be profitable. As Dr. Joseph Jastrow, the eminent American psychologist, says, sensibility is the master quality of the mental make-up—beginning with the sensory world and continuing on upward.<sup>23</sup>

In growing silence to the ordinary levels of thinking and being, the mystic centers his attention upon extraordinary realities. His devotion generates the current. Its voltage determines the degree of his attainment. The voltage, in turn, depends upon his sincerity, integrity, and the intensity of his search. Silence he cultivates to the highest degree of which he is capable, that he may function unhampered by worldly distractions and limitations.

Not all mystical experience has a religious flavor. The erroneous impression that it has, is due to the fact that almost all the reports and descriptions of it come from religionists. Removing it from the religious field, to which it has been too exclusively assigned, mystical experience may well be simply defined as contact with areas of life larger than those touched in ordinary consciousness. The

enormous field of consciousness—what it is, its levels, its reaches, its laws—is one in which scientific advancement has been very slow. But since, in the language of Emerson, “There is no chance, no anarchy in the universe. All is system and gradation,”<sup>24</sup> the possibility of discovering ever further reaches or realms of law perpetually beckons the scientific seeker, until, bit by bit, “Opinion mounts by graduated ladder to knowledge.” It is frequently difficult to find basic law, the thread through the maze. But “difficult” and “impossible” are not synonymous. The findings in the field of the psychology of the unconscious are beginning to penetrate deeper areas and hold the promise of furnishing the key to a better understanding of that complex question, consciousness.

Mystical experiences of a *non-religious* character have been reported by some of the foremost intellectuals of modern times. William James records certain experiences which he describes as “very sudden and incomprehensible enlargements of the conscious field, bringing with them a curious sense of cognition of real fact.”<sup>25</sup> Reviewing the uniqueness of these experiences with a refreshing clarity and a cogency usually lacking in mystical literature, he describes them thus:

The mode of consciousness was perceptual, not conceptual, —the field expanding so fast that there seemed no time for conception or identification to get in its work. There was a strongly exciting sense that my knowledge of past (or present?) reality was enlarging pulse by pulse, but so rapidly that my intellectual processes could not keep up the pace. The content was thus entirely lost to retrospection.<sup>26</sup>

Here we see something reminiscent of the difficulty confronting the mystic when he has attempted to recount

his experiences. Professor James goes on to speak of the ineradicable quality and the incisiveness with which these experiences registered on his consciousness, but an incisiveness so swift as to make recollection impossible for even so alert a mind. These are his words:

The feeling,—I won't call it belief, that I had had a sudden opening, had seen through a window, as it were, distant realities that incomprehensibly belong with my own life, was so acute that I cannot shake it off today.<sup>27</sup>

Another university professor, William P. Montague, relates an unusual experience of dynamic quality which took place decades ago, but whose effect has never left him. It took place shortly after he had conducted a particularly lively and profitable discussion on Kant. To give it in his own words:

I was walking home to lunch in fine spirits and full of satisfaction with the students and with the work that we were doing together. Suddenly I got the strangest experience; and if in my attempt to describe it I make it seem silly or even meaningless, I can only ask the reader's patience on the ground that, however preposterous he may find it, it has meant more to me than anything else that has happened in my life. The feeling came as I was crossing a little brook; and it was as if I could look into and down through each point of space and perceive a kind of well of indefinite depth. The new realm was like a fourth dimension of space, and yet as contained within each point it seemed to be a lesser thing than a spatial dimension. . . . It seemed to be the domain of intensity and density.<sup>28</sup>

So unique was the perception and the feeling it aroused that in the instant of its occurrence it seemed to him that he had discovered "the soul in its hiding-place, and not indirectly through dialectical inference but concretely

through an intuition.”<sup>29</sup> So overwhelming was this intensification of perception that, as Professor Montague expresses it, he went home “in a daze of ecstasy.”

Another eminent man who describes a mystical experience that burst in upon his consciousness during a solitary mood, is the English man of letters, J. Middleton Murry. Like the others, it is non-religious in character. During a time when enormous problems deeply troubled him—one of these a search within himself for a sense of his own individuality—there arose out of silent mulling a soul-stirring moment of clarification. In his spiritual autobiography, *God*, he tells of the trying period through which he struggled after war’s disillusionments and the death of his wife, Katharine Mansfield, had left him desolate and floundering. Withdrawing from society to be really alone, he hoped that calm silence might yield a solution to concerns that were gnawing at his vitals and destroying him. Recounting the climactic experience of suddenly finding a relationship between himself and reality, and the upsurge of his feelings, he says:

In the dark, in the dead, still house, I sat at the table facing the fire. I sat there motionless, it seemed, for hours, while I tried to face the truth that I was alone. Slowly and with an effort I made myself conscious that I was physically alone. . . . At last I had the sensation that I *was* in my hands and feet, that where they ended I also ended, as at a frontier of my being, and beyond that frontier stretched out vast immensities of space, of the universe, of the illimitable something that was other than I. . . . What happened then? If I could tell that, I should tell a secret indeed. But a moment came when the darkness of that ocean changed to light, the cold to warmth; when it swept in one great wave over the shores and frontiers of myself, when it bathed me and I was renewed; when the room was filled with a presence, and I

knew I was not alone any more, that the universe beyond held no menace, for I was part of it, that in some way for which I had sought in vain so many years, I *belonged*, and because I belonged I was no longer I, but something different, which could never be afraid in the old ways or cowardly with the old cowardice.<sup>30</sup>

His agonized thoughts had cried aloud for satisfying answers to his questions. Solitariness and silent penetration cleansed and refreshed him, removing from him in an instant, years of doubt. Commenting on the restoration of well-being and the sense of integration and long-lived effect this mystical experience brought with it, he continues:

It impelled me into a course of action which in a sense I still follow; it set my mind upon a chain of thinking which I have never relinquished; it restored me to life of the kind I value; and, indeed, it has occupied me ever since.<sup>31</sup>

Havelock Ellis is another strong intellect to whom mystical experience brought with it an instantaneous clearing away of destructive doubts. In a flash the conflict between his believing heart and his skeptical mind was resolved—a conflict that was undoing him. As a young man with an eager and keen intellect, his mind presented evaluations of the universe that did violence to his heart, which wanted to believe, yet could no longer do so along traditional religious lines. In his *Dance of Life* he describes these warring elements within himself, and his inability to deny the validity of one or the other. In the midst of this period of conflict, he read James Hinton's *Life in Nature*. In a flash of insight it reconciled for him the conflict between his heart and mind. Describing the reaction as one that occurred "with the swiftness of an

electric contact," he goes on to say, "the dull aching tension was removed; the two opposing psychic tendencies were fused in delicious harmony and my whole attitude toward the universe was changed."<sup>32</sup>

His effort to find words to convey the changed attitude toward life, wrought without conscious striving, yields this account:

It was no longer an attitude of hostility and dread, but of confidence and love. My self was one with the Not-Self, my will one with the universal will. I seemed to walk in light; my feet scarcely touched the ground; I had entered a new world. The effect of that swift revolution was permanent.<sup>33</sup>

Still another well-known writer of the day to join the company of those who emphasize the unshakable permanence of the inner life, is the English novelist, Hugh Walpole. His stress on its supreme value and on the invulnerability of the inner peace it yields, is expressed in terms perhaps more general than the previously quoted writers, yet none the less dynamic. In his most recent book, "Roman Fountain," he thus expresses himself regarding experiences of an inner nature:

This book is an honest record of the moments when the writer, not a very spiritual man, perceived the strong, unchecked, rich, glorious undercurrent of the inner, outer, wider, fuller life of the spirit. *That* life immediate current history cannot terminate or destroy, although it may influence it.<sup>34</sup>

In all these non-religious mystical experiences, a degree of silence was observed—sometimes more deliberate, sometimes less. Sometimes a moment's withdrawal, a brief but permeating relaxation, was a sufficient preliminary. Sometimes greater concentration was the gateway. But what characterized the experiences still more sharply in

each case was *heightened feeling*, a unique emotional intensity. Here is perhaps a humble correspondent to that ardor which marks the struggles of the religious mystic. All the witnesses refer to the expanded power they tapped, but to no two did it come in the same way.

Wordsworth, Blake, Browning, Schubert, Wagner, George Russell (AE), are but a few of the creative geniuses who have tried to convey their mystical experiences, whether they labeled them thus or not. In the greatest poets and dramatists the seer and the artist are always harmoniously blended. It is what they felt or saw through other than physical senses that is their permanent legacy to the race. On the other hand, much that they thought out or reasoned through has disappeared with the fashions of their times. Goethe is known to have been at a loss to explain in rational language much that his prophetic tongue poured forth in immortal truth and beauty.

Great minds of all ages, spiritual leaders of peoples, forerunners and pioneers of great movements have all recorded transforming experiences which have constructively changed their own lives and changed the destinies of millions. Perhaps at least a glimpse of the mystical was needed to light their fire or to maintain their zeal.

In any event, the detractors of mysticism must take into account its inspirational, dynamic, revivifying force. That which is empty of meaning to them, which may seem untrustworthy or even pathological, may strike others quite differently. And some of these others, as we have seen, march in the vanguard of humanity.

Besides the *individual* path to soul-healing and expansion of power enjoyed by the mystic, of the religious or non-religious trend, there are many *group* approaches

to larger horizons through the portals of silence. Refreshment of the soul, and its dedication, re-invigorated, to the service of God and man, is the motivation of periodic retreats in the Catholic Church and other branches of Christianity. Strengthening of will-power, of courage and of endurance are leading objectives in this well-organized use of silence.

By deliberately undertaking to break the mundane routine, the participants in a retreat strive to reverse the current of their energies, physical, emotional and mental; that is, they endeavor to minimize the first and to focus the second and third inwardly to source, to God. They seek this means of counteracting the pull of materialism. They believe that periodic withdrawal from practical pursuits replenishes spiritual energy, and that as a result they bring back to their practical living new resources and staying power. Retreats are a considerable subject in themselves, and hence will be treated separately in a subsequent chapter.

The Quakers, too, in their extensive use of silence, recognize an expansion of individual power as one of their purposes. Frequent reference is made to the enrichment and enhancement of life, rather as a by-product, however, than as the goal of the process of becoming still. The infusion of power they call "an intense sense of overflowing and abounding life,"<sup>35</sup> "an infilling, uplifting, redeeming sense, heightening all things,"<sup>36</sup> "an unfailing resource of the soul."<sup>37</sup>

The sense of enlargement experienced in silent group worship was picturesquely described by an early Quaker, Isaac Pennington, in these words, "They (the participants) are like a heap of fresh and burning coals, warming one another as a great strength, freshness and vigor of life

flows into all.”<sup>38</sup> This *plus* quality deriving from the group use of silence is stressed again and again among Quaker writers.

Recognition of the spiritual healing following silent worship is also frequent. As William Penn put it, “True silence is the rest of the mind, and is to the spirit what sleep is to the body—nourishment and refreshment.”<sup>39</sup>

The deliberate application of silence in the work of healing is undertaken by the groups in England which constitute The Fellowship of Silence, referred to in a previous chapter. So concrete a use of silence is unknown among the Friends. In those aspiring to this healing service the need is for “a clean soul, great compassion, and a love which transcends the bonds of self-interest.”<sup>40</sup>

The formation of Fellowship groups, both within and without the Church of England, is advocated by their founder, the Reverend Cyril Hepher, for the express purpose of bringing about healings. In their practice of silence specific conditions are laid down for effective physical healing. Instructions are given regarding the composition of the group and its procedure.

Small groups of persons should be formed for active prayerful thought, in definite places and for a definite time and object. Such a group must be most carefully composed. . . . Each member must have a complete trust in the others. All should have the same object and desire. A want of harmony between the members will breed failure. The group must meet on the basis of silence, inner as well as outer. All outside interests must be laid aside. . . . Ten minutes’ concentrated thought on the individual is enough, the object being to exert on this person an influence for cure, if the Lord will.<sup>41</sup>

The records of the groups’ activities show many instances of physical cures effected by this method.

It will be seen that both the Quakers and the followers of the Fellowship groups lay stress upon the important rôle played by the *attitude* of the worshiper. Unless that attitude is one of reverence and sincerity, mere silence is ineffectual. Devotion and active, willing obedience to spiritual demands, as the communicant sees them, must permeate the atmosphere in order to make the silence a living fountain, not a stagnant pool—a danger recognized as threatening under unwholesome conditions.

The New Thought movement in its healing work also makes extensive use of silence. A physician in the movement, Dr. A. A. Lindsay, credits the “principles of silence” with having brought about thousands of cures and instances of expanded power.<sup>42</sup> He not only states that undesirable habits have been eliminated, but goes so far as to maintain that manias and even insanity have responded to the right use of silence. “There is a scientific formula for obtaining vision, for receiving inspiration, true and dependable guidance, instruction and comfort.”<sup>43</sup> “The blending of the conscious mind with the soul” is the aim as designated by Dr. Lindsay, and to this end aspiration to do one’s best, “intelligent passivity,” external and internal relaxation are said to be necessary.

Freedom from the incessant call of stimuli in the material world is the secret of relaxation. It may be freedom only from the more routine and grinding of these stimuli and a substitution of others, as when a man “lets down” by playing eighteen holes of golf or three hours of bridge. But it is clear that a form of silence is involved even here, and that the silence becomes of a deeper and perhaps more profitable nature when the thought life is similarly detached.

An Eastern student of Silence as a means to power,

Swami Paramānanda, sees beyond healing, to an expansion of mental equipment so great that it may amount to genius. "One of the most interesting phenomena that takes place in connection with the practice of silence," he tells us, "is that the mind evolves creative genius. It (the practice) leads to the discovery of inherent reserve and originality."<sup>44</sup>

If this is so, it may be because "the threshold of consciousness" is lowered, to use the terms of the modern psychology. Areas in the unconscious are contacted and their resources of experience, association, and feeling tone made available. How wide and deep these areas may stretch, what they may impinge upon objectively, is a subject far too great in its implications to be more than touched upon here. Volumes have been written, and yet the surface barely scratched. A whole broad, new avenue has been opened through the researches into telepathy and clairvoyance.<sup>45</sup> These have demonstrated among much else that a certain degree of relaxation in the subject is necessary to obtaining his best results..

We must leave such fascinating inquiries as, How far can a person dip into his own unconscious reservoir of power? How well-directed and useful is the incursion likely to be? How much help may he be receiving from minds other than his own? This last question arises directly out of the establishment of telepathy as a human faculty, beyond the possibility of coincidence to explain.

Suffice it to say here that of two speakers, equally informed and equally proficient in their delivery, the one who will hold his audience is not he who focuses on his facts and the data marshaled in his conscious mind, but he who, less constrained to such material, is free to devote some of his attention to establishing *rappo*rt with his

hearers, and to drawing on his subconscious association of ideas.

Here let us remember too that Yogic practice, the great discipline of the East, places its emphasis upon the unconscious as the essential force in mental life. To this extent it agrees with psychoanalysis in the West. Dr. Kovoort T. Behanan in his recent scientific study of Yoga,<sup>46</sup> under the auspices of the Institute of Human Relations at Yale University, includes a chapter comparing the two systems of thought. After his own conquest of Yogic discipline, he assures us, he felt an undeniable emotional freedom and power of self-mastery.

And so, a wide range of evidence indicates that the purposeful, progressive cultivation of silence is not a negation, an escape, a cowardly surrender to beguiling ephemera, or a cheating of life's legitimate demands. Goals may vary, and success in attaining them may vary still more. But a constructive end would appear to be the norm, and would appear also to be actually accomplished in the degree to which the exercise is rightly conducted and the requisite qualities in the subject are present.

"By our fruits shall ye know us" say in effect the devotees of Silence. There are perhaps no infallible, or even specific, safeguards against dissembling, but nowhere is an inherent "honor system" more successful, or outer form without inner activity more inutile. Ideal quiet in the place of retreat will avail nothing when mind and heart are turbulent. Philandering desires within are as destructive to the quest as bombshells from without. All the myriad forces of distraction, subjective and objective, must have been routed, and this merely as a preliminary to the next and greater task of integration. For it is only

in terms of the unified energies—resolute, strong, disciplined, *rightly directed*—that the longer journeys are made, the greater treasures found.

The theme of all participants in Silence as an instrumentality is its generous contribution to the deepening and enriching of life, to the healing of mental and physical ills, and to the quickening and exposing of latent faculties. It is a theme weaving in and out, like a thread of pure gold, in the tapestry in every great racial tradition. Often the Scriptures and the loftiest poetry of a people shadow forth in allegory and symbol the lands, planes, conditions, accessible to the illumined vision. They seldom explain, however, the steps necessary to attainment, nor the place of Silence in these steps. Techniques are not appropriate to wisdom-lore. But its message, it would seem, is understood by the more developed, on the principle that “like is known to like.” It is for the teachers of men to aid those who care to take the steps and see for themselves, not for the writers of Scripture to discourse upon them. And fortunately, true teachers have at all times been available. Though not always easily found, true seekers have always found them.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE GROWING RETREAT MOVEMENT

Retreats in the wider sense of the term are as old as humanity. The occasional withdrawal from ordinary pursuits and devotion of the time thus set apart to "the service of God" in solitude and prayer is an ancient custom in every tradition. Both Old and New Testament are rich in examples of the practice—especially individual retreat. Moses' retirement to mountain heights to reflect in solitude and "commune with God" in deep silence, and Jesus' withdrawal into the desert for forty days for the same purpose, stand forth as supreme examples of retreats in biblical literature.

The early history of Christianity abounds with instances of individuals and groups who stepped aside from the accustomed routine of practical affairs to devote themselves to the religious life. Often this break with the usual, of longer or shorter duration, was in the solitary manner of a St. Anthony or a St. Benedict, who withdrew to distant mountain caves, maintaining their retreat from the world over a period of years. Often, too, groups of similarly-minded religious seekers banded together into what grew to be monastic orders.

Whether this quest for life of a different order be by the hermit alone or in the company of others, all such seeking rests on the basic concept of occasional retreat from outer activity for the freer cultivation of the life of the soul. Silence to worldly demands for receptivity

to spiritual demands has been a practice of individuals and groups down the ages. Or, to restate the purpose in terms of its dynamic, it is a retreat on one front for the sake of advancement on another; a ceding of territory in one direction toward its winning in a different direction.

Retreats as they are conducted today, rather than as they have been in the past, are the subject of this chapter. It will consider the growth of the movement as a semi-popular activity, responding to a human need—a need more widespread, if less intensive, than among the ancient religionists. How widespread is becoming better and better recognized. The retreat of today is organized, in contrast with the comparatively unorganized activity among the ancients, and is adapted to the complexities of modern life. In the past twenty-five years the movement has had an amazingly rapid growth, both within the Catholic Church, where its basic forms were introduced several hundred years ago, and in non-Catholic Christianity.

As an organized movement, retreats may be said to have begun in the sixteenth century, when St. Ignatius of Loyola prepared a set of spiritual exercises to be used during a special period of withdrawal from society for the strengthening of the religious impulse. This systematized discipline offered the means for preserving the spiritual content in religion, and as such became a powerful instrumentality in the struggle to hold back the tide of the Protestant Reformation with its more rationalistic, less mystical attitude.

These spiritual exercises became, and remain to this day, the basis of Catholic retreats throughout the world. Naturally the Jesuits, the religious order founded by Loyola, became the chief exponents of retreats and of the

Ignatian pattern underlying them. This Jesuit method for the cultivation of the religious life consists of instructions in the practice of meditation and prayer to be followed during the time the participant undertakes to cut himself off from his ordinary way of life.

Retreats are periods of solitude and ordered silent activity, dedicated to the benefit of the soul. Although undertaken in groups, the retreat requires the participant to be alone in his room or outdoors much of the time. For differing spans, varying with particular retreats from two days to one month, the laity and clergy of the Catholic Church undertake to control the trend of the participant's psychic and mental energy and to direct this force toward spiritual growth.

The usual length of a retreat for the laity is two and a half days in the eastern part of the United States, and three days in the west. The Society of Jesus, otherwise known as the Jesuits, was the first active (non-entirely contemplative) religious order in which the practice of a retreat became obligatory. Its members undertake an annual retreat of eight days. They must make a long, thirty-day retreat at least twice in their lives—once at the beginning of their Jesuit career and again just after their ordination to the priesthood.

All religious orders and the secular clergy and Bishops in the Catholic Church make annual retreats. Even though their daily life revolves around spiritual concerns, the clergy, as much as the laity, find themselves in need of opportunities for re-dedication and fresh spiritual infusion.

Those who have specialized in organizing laymen's retreats besides the Jesuits, who are foremost, are the Passionists and Franciscans. Chief among the orders

conducting retreats for women are the Sisters of the Cenacle who maintain retreat houses both in Manhattan and at Lake Ronkonkoma on Long Island, New York, and the Sisters of Marie Reparatrice who conduct retreats at their convent in Manhattan. There are some twenty-five Catholic permanent retreat houses for men in this country, and besides these about the same number of institutions where retreats are held in summer. Retreats organized for women number about the same. Special retreats are held for boys, girls and workers—built around the particular needs of the respective groups. The students in nearly all Catholic schools yearly make the spiritual exercises.

The Ignatian spiritual exercises constitute the ground-plan of the Catholic retreat, long or short, for clergy or laymen. Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical letter of December 20, 1929 declared them to be "the foremost instrument in the way of salvation and perfection." Their aim is to strengthen the impulse toward repentance and the desire for regeneration. Step by step the meditative prayers train the seeker in a progression designed to culminate in a dynamic change within himself—a greater degree of personal perfection. The Ignatian meditation is guarded against becoming a pious reverie, a hit-or-miss indulgence in reflections on religious themes. The dangers of unguided or misguided meditation, possible under the cloak of silence, are appreciated and planned against in these exercises.

Loyola recognized that the unharnessed imagination, if not furnished with adequate direction, will soon start a train of its own, making for conflict and turbulence. Hence, in order to preserve the psychic unity of the group, proper imagery is taught as a preliminary. Main-

taining the necessity of depending upon God, a second preliminary prayer is introduced for the special result desired from the ensuing meditation, so as to keep this latter from being only an intellectual consideration of religious truths. After these the seeker is ready to begin his meditation, which has for its object the increase, not of his knowledge of, but of his love for God, so that from this deepened love he will derive the strength to carry out His will. The meditation concludes with the "colloquy," an earnest personal prayer, to bind the whole retreat into a unity. The building up by the individual of a relationship with God, through special techniques, was the foundation-stone of Loyola's ardent work, and is today an outstanding part of the work of his followers.

It is the responsibility of the retreat Director to conduct it along lines as helpful as possible to the re-forming of the individual life and the seeking of its path to God—the two main objectives. The plan in modern retreats for furthering these objectives does not differ basically from that followed in the days of Loyola and the Counter Reformation he so vigorously championed. The details and regulations, however, in the present-day use of the exercises are varied according to the capacities and needs of the people using them. The plan contains the same scheme as of old for the allotment of time, and similar rules for the occupations, prayers and meditations scheduled for the retreat days.

Except for occasional periods for recreation and necessity, silence is the order during the entire period of withdrawal. When the retreatants assemble on their first day or evening, the Director sets the key and instructs in the ways the mind and heart should go during the period dedicated to the advancement of the spiritual life. The

retreatants then go to their individual rooms, there to meditate, to strengthen their determination to serve God, to seek guidance and help in the solution of critical problems. The Director having given subjects for meditation as part of his instruction, urges the participants to expand these for themselves and to come to individual conclusions, or better, a more spiritual outlook upon them.

During this time of soul-search, they are to converse with God, imploring His help in these labors. The participant is urged, upon leaving the group gathered for instruction, to allow nothing on the way to his room to draw his attention down to material levels—not to drink water, not to smoke, not even to touch hand to the stair-rail—gestures insignificant in themselves, but which might be enough to start the train of attention going downward to sense-levels. Once the downward trend has been set into motion, the senses are easily stimulated and drawn away from that on which the will would fasten itself. The effort must be to detach the senses, the feelings and the thoughts deliberately and strenuously from their ordinary paths so as to break the stranglehold of worldliness and to set free spiritual energy.

Retreats have then as their motivation the strengthening of the will so that it can address itself more easily and effectually toward religious goals, thereby setting into motion a trend counter to worldly attractions and temporary pleasures. The treadmill pursuit of practical ends is held to starve the soul. Retreats aim to feed it. Pursuit of the larger good instead of the interests and impulses of the moment requires conscious effort. Left to chance, the impulse toward the longer-range objective tends to dry up and wither, like a neglected garden. Regularly cultivated, spiritual questing is deemed to

strengthen and stimulate the individual, and through him in turn, society in general.

To seek the pleasure of the moment is to seek the line of least resistance. To substitute that which is right for that which is pleasant is the mark of the maturing individual. Finally, when that which is right becomes also what is most pleasing, we have the sign of a truly matured being.

Retreat-houses have been referred to as "God's crucible," for they are seen as the alembic in which the work of inner transformation can go on, the place where the bonds to "the lower" can be dissolved. In their stead can grow the higher impulses—a growth brought about when the right ingredients of prayer and meditation have been introduced into the crucible. During such periods formal, ritualistic piety and dogma are left behind, giving way to a freer opportunity for personal spiritual growth, fed and sustained by the life and truth behind dogma. If the retreatant labors rightly, he may be energized with the dynamic pulsing of religious inspiration and aspiration. So great a spiritual change is held to be virtually impossible in the midst of the everyday environment of ordinary mankind.

Temporary sacrifice of the environment is a minimum requirement if the larger well-being of the individual is sought. Haphazard attention to spiritual concerns, grudgingly withdrawn from practical pursuits, is said to be worth less than no attention at all. At least then, when the individual does nothing to feed his higher nature, he expects nothing in the way of its growth. He cannot be subject to disappointment nor disillusionment, for he is not making a search. But when he makes sporadic, desultory efforts to reach deeper levels in himself, he is likely

to feel himself cheated when he does not attain to these levels. He ought to know, but usually does not, that he has no right to expect to achieve self-betterment under such circumstances.

Retreats are said to furnish that continuous application of sunlight and heat which a germinating seed needs for its growth. Without these, the seed lies idle in the soil, nothing energizing its forward thrust. The spiritual nature in man, according to age-old teachings, is as a seed awaiting man's cultivation. Right conditions, brought about only by individual effort, have been known to foster its growth. Self-denial, of and by itself, cannot produce these right conditions. The self-denial must have a moral purpose behind it; it must be deliberately undertaken for spiritual attainment, or it does not furnish the proper soil.

How heroic must be the effort to cut loose occasionally from the ordinary attractions is evident from the ubiquity and insistence of their call. Weak, frustrated persons withdraw easily from the world out of a sense of defeat, but that does not count. The strong, however, those who have achieved worldly success, have a battle on their hands if deeper promptings urge them on. To feed those promptings they must learn to put themselves deliberately beyond the reach of the world's importunities and distractions.

Engagement in the battle of life being universal, the need for periodic withdrawals from it is equally universal. Not that it is always recognized. These periods are often the dawn of the individual's realization of the responsibility he must assume for himself—for his stage of development, whatever it is. Blame for the state of the inner exchequer is then less likely to be placed on

society and outer circumstances, and more likely to be placed with oneself, where it usually belongs. When that inner state is poverty-stricken, it can be recognized as the result of starvation, decreed by oneself, not by society. It is for these reasons that religious leaders have urged retreats, exhorting men to be willing to face themselves and thereby acquire that consciousness of their own responsibility toward themselves which is essential to spiritual advancement. If such responsibility were more generally realized, there might be less hysteria, less restlessness, less sense of frustration. There would be at least a better balance in the individual's life, even if no great spiritual achievements resulted. In the calm of the retreat many an unfortunate state of inner affairs can be justly viewed and dealt with. In that atmosphere there can be born the quiet strength to take the responsibility for, and to do battle with, individual shortcomings.

Unconsciously, if not consciously, absorption in the more remote has often been resorted to as an effective antidote to confusion in the nearby. Contemplation of majestic natural scenery, of star-studded skies in their immensity and adherence to cosmic law, has in all times been a restorer of equilibrium to the storm-tossed soul. The same idea, on another level, prevails in the practice of a retreat.

A cessation of the momentum toward outer distractions is eagerly sought by retreatants before its force succeeds in the threatened destruction of the better nature. To be sure, it takes strength to stop the momentum enforced upon the ordinary life by the routine of duties, responsibilities and pleasures. It takes will-power, as already indicated, to withdraw interest from alluring and insistent calls of the world. Knowing well the difficulties

encountered, leaders in the retreat movement have formulated counsels to aid the novice. His desire to reverse the natural extroverted trends is not enough to accomplish his purpose. Guidance in sequential early steps is as necessary in spiritual pursuits as in practical pursuits. The beginner in spiritual endeavors sees the value of following a master who can tell him what is valid and what is invalid, and save him needless wandering and blundering, but the retreat Director is cautioned by Ignatius not to make too many suggestions to the retreatant, and to allow God's grace to stir and move him.

Step by step the retreatant is taught to direct his will upwards, counteracting the force of gravity. For gravity—the pull downward—enters into subtler, spiritual affairs as definitely as it does in the literal, physical world. In the language of an able leader in work of this kind, the retreatant is urged to "abstract himself from the things of sense, narrow more and ~~more~~ more his field of consciousness and finally draw his attention in toward the center, until he fix it as best he may upon some single point at the very heart of his deepest desire; let him lose himself on the summits of untouched serenity."<sup>1</sup>

A retreat differs from "a day of recollection," another type of withdrawal from worldly pursuits frequently used in the Catholic Church. The retreat implies the reservation of sufficient time to permit the expulsion of thoughts of previous occupations and the cultivation of new, up-building thoughts. A day of reflection, on the other hand, devoted though it is to the quiet collection of scattered energy, is not sufficient for the deeper purpose of a retreat. The shortest time considered adequate for a retreat's duration is three days, allowing the first day for throwing off the old, the second day for relaxing, and the

third for the thrust forward. All three steps are deemed essential in an orderly progression aiming toward spiritual advancement, and at least a day is held to be necessary to capture the flavor of each step. Not so with the shorter withdrawal involved in "a day of recollection." There is something of the same difference between "a day of recollection" and a retreat as between a day off and a vacation.

One might say the Catholic solicitude for the retreat movement is due to the appreciation of its potency as a spiritual force. Protestant recognition of the movement derives more from the desire to restore the fire and the heroic, radiant qualities inherent in early Christianity.

Among those in Protestantism who are seeking to rebuild what they frankly admit is the waning power of the Church are some who ascribe this condition to the abandonment of its original vigor in the pursuit of spiritual goals. Dr. Henry Dwight Sedgewick, prominent in the movement toward revitalizing Protestantism, is one of those who sees a great loss in the transfer of the Church's interest to practical affairs. He maintains that the modern Church unfortunately goes as the world goes, permitting the latter to lead. With the contemplative life cast into the limbo of things outworn, he sees a detriment to both the world and the Church—to the world because it needs spiritual leadership; to the Church because it can no longer vitally answer individual needs.

Recapture of the spirit of religion is being more and more widely seen by Protestantism as essential to its preservation. Regeneration of religious life in terms of individual experience is therefore being earnestly and ardently sought. Thus it is that the retreat movement is growing apace also in Protestant circles. Retreats are being fostered to help the worshiper find that serenity

of spirit on which depends the power to see with greater clarity and to carry over that seeing into everyday life.

The Protestant Church has been instrumental in organizing into retreats the desire of many of its communicants to participate in a day or days of quiet, so that without seeming queer, lay people might have a place wherein the rule of silence reigns, wherein to cultivate and invite the spontaneous flow of the devotional life. As one advocate of the practice puts it, "The blending of silence with fellowship seems to create an atmosphere in which the sense of the spiritual in man is set free."

One of the well-known retreat houses conducted by Episcopalian nuns is St. Anna's Home at Ralston, New Jersey. Another large and interesting establishment for women in the Episcopalian Church is the retreat known as Adelynrood, in South Byfield in Massachusetts. Here annually four to five hundred women, widely diversified in outlook, social strata and occupation, gather for a three-day retreat. It is taken for granted that before a woman desires to become a member of such a group, she will already have had sufficient practice in prayer and meditation to partake willingly, even gladly, of the discipline of a retreat. However, a preliminary requirement for inclusion among the prospective retreatants is a period of preparation and self-testing lasting a year.

Membership in retreats of this kind is based upon admission requirements and tests, and is thus quite different from the unrestricted participation in the retreats conducted by the Catholics. Here all that is required for a person desiring to participate for the first time is a letter of introduction from a priest or from a person who has attended before.

Vida Scudder, long a member and regular participant in the retreats at Adelynrood, speaks warmly and devotedly of these strength-giving days in her autobiography, *On Journey*. She recounts how she came to know, after due preparation, that "ears became sensitive in the stillness to unheard melodies sweeter, as Keats rightly tells us, than the heard." Describing one of her experiences born in that stillness, she says:

Once, in Retreat, I lay long motionless, on the top of a little hill, watching stars rise and set. A strange thing befell me; I became aware of the turning earth. I felt myself borne onward by that relentless turning, in a rhythm slow but sure. Seasickness was nothing to it. Mentally dizzy and appalled, the last stay of my mortality was denied. And then—I found my Absolute; it was in the rhythm I found it. In motion itself was my rest—that ceaseless motion which is the music of the spheres.<sup>2</sup>

Leaving aside the question as to whether Miss Scudder's "absolute" would be the absolute for others, or is subjectively and not objectively an ultimate, one cannot deny the climactic nature of the experience. Its validity can only be judged in the light of its results—by the degree to which its quality entered into and influenced her practical life.

There are also many gatherings of the clergy which are called retreats, but are not so in the special sense of the word used throughout our discussion thus far. Often periods of time are taken by groups of churchmen during which they withdraw from practical concerns and confine themselves to a consideration of church problems, theological questions and earnest seeking with their fellow-leaders. These withdrawn discussion periods are not primarily retreats for spiritual strengthening. They may

engender that quality secondarily, but essentially they are a meeting of minds, an occasion for clarification of issues and institutional concerns.

In the real sense of the word, both modern and ancient, retreats are consecrated to higher purposes, for encouraging the religious soldier in his fighting spirit for the things of the soul, for strengthening his determination not to "sell his soul for a mess of pottage," for making himself receptive to spiritual promptings which are crowded out in ordinary living.

## CHAPTER VII

### MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH SILENCE

Enough has already been said about the mystics to indicate that theirs is a more conscious and deliberate use of silence than prevails among any other group, even among the religious orders. Theirs is also a more exigent use, in the psychological and moral sense, than that of monastic discipline or penance, as this chapter will attempt to show. Above all, it is motivated, in the higher types of mystics, by such passionate yearning, such utter abandonment of all ordinary desires and necessities in the pursuit of the goal, that average humanity can but stand and wonder.

More directly and uncompromisingly too than probably the strictest of the silent brotherhoods, like the Trappists, the mystic breaks his bonds to this world for the sake of another, of which he stoutly maintains he has had immediate experience. To him this other world is the only one that has value and permanence; and, for the recompense of even a brief taste of it, he considers all material values well lost. What has the external world to offer, he asks, in comparison with the inner, or the world he claims to have reached through the powers within his own depths?

Sometimes, as with a St. Augustine or a St. Francis of Assisi, he has drunk deeply and avidly of the pleasures of the senses. But they become small in his eyes in the face of others attainable when the call of the senses has

been hushed. The ties of affection, the delights of the heart in home and children, are to him watery as compared to the wine of the more galvanic ties he forms in the states when he has released himself from the hold of the environment.

To be sure, it is difficult to see how anyone can long maintain the discipline of silence without a steady fire of the heart, and the chances are that those who, although aspiring to become mystics, fail to develop that fire, fall by the wayside or devote themselves more largely to works in the world. It is possible to have had years of experience with Silence in its many applications without having had mystical experience. Not all who enter upon the mystic path succeed in achieving the goal,—experience.

From the mystic's point of view this is tragic—a wandering about without destination—however enriching the results may have been in practical ways, such as inventions, artistic creations and new resourcefulness generally.

The "practice of the Presence of God" is the métier of the mystic, and, as he believes, the very reason for his being. But in so difficult a career many will fall short of the higher attainments. Instead they are likely to tarry in the alluring by-paths of imagination and other uncharted terrain in the psychic world. St. Theresa, who was not only a great mystic but a great teacher of aspirants in the same direction, has much to say of what we would today characterize as pseudo-mysticism, hallucination, psychological projection; and a large part of her instruction is devoted to methods of avoiding these dilemmas. The East has met this problem too, and it is a proof of the rigor of the battle before its victorious conclusion.

A little farther on we shall take up the question from the psychological point of view and try to throw some modern light on the boulders and crevasses to be negotiated by those pilgrims bent upon reaching the more ultimate hostels, and the culmination of the journey.

Allowing for all bona fide questioning as to just what may be meant by the "presence of God," we must remember that the mystic vigorously maintains that no appraisal of validity or value of what he reaches can be made without experience similar to his own. When that is attained, he insists there will be no appraisal contrary to his own. And we must grant that many of their number have won the right to have their judgment respected, for in the West at least they have taken their place as men among men. The greater mystics have forfeited nothing of their efficiency and contribution to the practical world. Francis needed all the diplomacy of a statesman in conducting the affairs of his order and his relations with the Pope. St. Theresa was a first-class administrator. Catherine of Sienna would rank high today in the world of social service. Francis Xavier was an explorer and scholar of unusual stature. Ignatius Loyola was a soldier and organizer of the first rank. Plato and Plotinus rendered yeoman service to philosophy. Their teachings are still being chewed upon, but have hardly yet been digested by the world's greatest scholars.

Below these giants are the lesser mystics, sometimes only humble "hewers of wood and drawers of water," but doing their day's work as faithfully and as effectually as their brothers lacking the "gift."

It behooves us therefore to be wary of either attempting to rule out the "reality" of the mystic or to classify it arbitrarily. To be patronizing toward that which we

may not have qualified to attain may be a worse *faux pas* than the reaction of the fabled fox to the grapes beyond his reach. To label the mystic's experience wish-fulfillment, of somatic nature, or the religious disguise of sex, as do some analytic psychologists, may be to invite the ridicule of a more comprehending age. That age may be less absorbed by the stuffs and forces of the physical world and the body than we are, and may be able to see similarities and correspondences between material and non-material experiences—not always arbitrarily classifying them as duplications and as identical in source.

The mystic himself will rarely trouble to defend his claims—though more than once he has died for them. He is not argumentative or critical-minded. He is more likely to use appeal and persuasion where he believes there may be a response, and to refrain courteously where there is none. Often the example of his own life has been the most powerful argument he could offer, though perhaps only to those who could see behind appearances. He finds it futile to tilt with the scholar or material scientist, because they would, in his view, try to compare incommensurables, limit the unlimited, define the indefinable. To them he says merely, in effect, "Come on in, gentlemen, the water is fine. Don't theorize about it from that rocky, cheerless bank. It will be very different from what you conclude anyway. But have a care as you dive! If you are soft you will get a shock. And it is deep in here, with a swift current; and some have drowned."

It may be indicative of a more understanding attitude, in spite of the rationalism of this age, that the mystic finds tough-minded champions today. Scientific advance has actually been of benefit to him, even though he has traditionally regarded materialism as his enemy and has

sought always to loosen its bonds upon him. If the mystic of today has lost among the masses the honor bestowed upon him in the bygone age of faith, he has also escaped the superstition which sometimes burned him at the stake and the political persecution which menaced him when his group or his utterances were unpopular with the rulers.

Today some of the leading minds in philosophy, psychology and science have risen to the mystic's defense, in addition to the students of religion and certain outstanding men of letters. Among the philosophers, Bergson, Berdyaev, Whitehead and Hocking have paid him tribute. Professor Bennett's *A Philosophical Study of Mysticism* is as full an appreciation of mystic values as can perhaps ever be made "from the outside." In psychology, William James was a pioneer in the recognition of mystical experience.

Modern psychology is also confronting the question, although from quite another angle—that of supersensory faculties. In the onward march of science the mystic has most to hope for from the advance of psychology, particularly the psychology of the unconscious—and this, despite its neglect or undervaluation of his special field of endeavor. The work being done at Duke University, under Dr. Rhine, and the investigations into parapsychology in Europe are approaches to one aspect at least—perhaps the humblest—of the mystic's experience.

Still another road leading in the direction of the Rome of mysticism is that of psychic research. The large amount of evidence it has collected over the past forty years, even if nothing is considered except that which was obtained under test conditions, goes far to show the possibility of extraordinary means of communication.

In the cultivation and exercise of supersensory faculties

there is demanded a certain "tuning out" from the stimuli from the physical world, whether so labeled or not; and to that degree silence is a factor in the experiments. True, there are many degrees of "tuning out." The mystic exemplifies the higher degrees both in the completeness of his separation from the material world when he enters into supernormal states of consciousness, and also in his continued freedom from worldly temptations; i.e., however active he may be *in* the world, he is yet not *of* it. He may have lapses, to be sure, for which he chastises himself severely, but the aim and orientation is always away from the lure of the three-dimensional, the visible and tangible. Such an attitude and endeavor play no part in the minor and temporary "tuning out" necessary to extra-sensory perception. Separation from external stimuli here is more in the nature of a relaxation—providing soil favorable for receptivity and obtaining "impressions." This in contrast with the inner activity which is typical of the mystic. The mystic assures us that the difference in the grade of results corresponds with the difference in the grade of silence.

In line with the revived interest in mystical experience, it is worthy of note that small groups in various parts of the country have been making attempts to duplicate the experiences of the mystic, or what they understand these to be. They believe that the visions, revelations and communications of which not only the Christian-Hebraic but all scriptures speak, are possible to people today—at least to those who will fit themselves for their reception.

Together with a growing interest toward supersensory realities, there presents itself a growing need for clarification in these matters, for understanding what is required in the individual, in both his conscious and his

subconscious activity; what grade of experience he has the right to seek with hope of success; what refractions through personal or petty motives enter; what the effect of suggestibility is. The clearing-up cannot be done from any vantage point of lesser perspective than the philosophic, that is, the wise and universal teachings pertaining to man and his evolutionary processes. The great leaders of humanity who have taught them have always taken account of grades and qualities of extended consciousness and mystical experience. They have not, however, worked out or taught techniques for either attainment or discrimination in these directions. It is here that modern science and its particular contribution, the scientific method, have a great opportunity.

The typical mystic works neither scientifically nor with the aid of his reasoning mind, if he can help it. His motive power is his fervid, yearning, passionate heart; his joy in fruition akin to that of the bride and groom in their first ecstasy. He recoils at the thought of objective study, even as would the enraptured pair. He makes himself ready—and how much that involves cannot be known to the uninitiated—and leaves the rest to God.

/ If you tell him that there are reaches in his subconscious life involved, and that he may not have done with them all he should have done in spite of his labors upon the conscious areas of his life, he will answer, "I can but still my senses, silence my lower nature with all my desire, my longing, my will, my hope. I meet my devils and give them battle. If some remain unknown to me, and therefore unconquered, they are my cross and I must persevere in spite of them."/

Herein lies at once the mystic's strength and his weakness. Were he hedged about with caution, he could not

burst through obstacles of the flesh, of crowd opinion, of distrust of his own powers and worthiness, of the call of the world. Free from such inhibitions, and fortified by such glimpses and contacts as he has already had, he seeks with increasing fire to cultivate the "presence of God," reining in all his energies and directing their stream from the outer to the inner world, from the lesser to the "greater realities." And the cleavage he achieves is undoubtedly more complete than that of any other group we have touched upon so far.

More than any other group he illustrates that Silence, to be valid and far reaching in its effects, must not only negate the lower nature, but must turn the entire force of that nature in another direction.

In the lesser mystic the voice of the physical and emotional nature may still make itself felt, though it has been repressed as far as will, will-power, and all the weapons of the conscious mind can accomplish. These calls are subtle, and often require more delicate perception to sift out than could possibly be expected of the ordinary devotee.

Training which includes the aid of psychology both recognizes and deals with these problems and so can save much needless confusion and unhappiness. Purification is no less cleansing if done with the aid of science and may be more economic and effectual, although nothing can take the place of the zeal, the courage, the selflessness and the endurance of the mystic. His is a type of activity of a psychic nature quite as exacting as any demanded of the man who makes his mark in the material world. Who shall say that it is less worthy, or less likely to arrive at goals that are significant?

The Silence of the mystic then is a rejection of the

world's demands upon his interest and attention, including the demands of his own physical organism and the desires of his heart, insofar as these are the ordinary desires of humanity. And that Silence brooks no intrusion, even in the midst of strenuous practical activity. It is the Silence of a type of masterhood, in the greater mystics, and is so far removed from the popular levels that there may no longer remain any resemblance to these—not even the outward literal sign of the sealed lips.

Yet the mystic has also his more formal periods of silence, in which he devotes himself to meditation, and there is no question but that these are his refuge and his joy, however energetically he may at other times be at work in the world. Here he gathers strength, refreshment, inspiration, and here he attains his completest detachment from the environment. This is to him his real "entering the silence." Its attainment is a process with preliminary steps before the full state is achieved.

In some of the foremost mystics, as in the widely beloved Brother Lawrence, these steps have been so often and so thoroughly accomplished, that they seem almost to be dispensed with. More probably there are recapitulated instantaneously and the expanded state of consciousness is reached without apparent delay. This is the psychological term, of course. The mystic calls it "union" or "practicing the Presence."

In general three stages of progression are recognized as leading to the goal. Consciously or instinctively the mystic traverses them all, though with varying degrees of intensity and of success.

The first stage is "concentration." It has for its object the stilling of outgoing energies and their focus upon a religious theme. Such centering of attention is difficult,

but is regarded as essential before turning inward, since forces which are scattered cannot be directed.

The early steps for the novice in this discipline are naturally a reflection upon sense experience, partly with the deliberate purpose of more properly evaluating it before laying it aside or leaving it behind. From this point on, however, the development of Silence becomes increasingly "internal," in relation with the height of the religious goal and the capacity for self-discipline on the part of the seeker.

Concentration is the effort to still as far as possible both afferent and efferent nerve currents, in order to encourage "interior discourse." It is held to create the necessary atmosphere for penetration into deeper areas —areas which the mystic sees as excluded from the consciousness of those oriented to the external world alone. The aim of concentration and meditation from the early stages on is not to empty the mind so as to usher in a state of "wool-gathering," but on the contrary, to make it function more alertly, but in supermundane directions. The activities of the surface mind are checked to make those of the deeper ranges accessible, to start going an interior movement opposite to the sense-fed and self-centered movement of ordinary consciousness.

Energy once ingathered is then at the disposal of inward stimuli or promptings. Inner activity is self-motivated and requires self-control to a degree far in excess of that required in external activity. One of the goals of the harnessed forces is the cultivation of capacities and faculties which will open non-sensory avenues of knowledge. Among these the faculty of intuition (so-called) and receptivity to revelation are deemed worthiest of achievement.

To obtain a little flavor of what the first steps in cutting the threads to environment means, Evelyn Underhill suggests the following experiment:

Look for a little time, in a special and undivided manner, at some simple, concrete and external thing. . . . Willfully refuse the messages which countless other aspects of the world are sending, and so concentrate your whole attention on this one act of sight that all other objects are excluded from the conscious field. Do not think, but as it were pour out your personality toward it; let your soul be in your eyes. Almost at once, this new method of perception will reveal unsuspected qualities in the external world. First, you will perceive about you a strange and deepening quietness. Next, you will become aware of a heightened significance, an intensified existence in the thing at which you look. . . . It seems as though the barrier between its life and your own, between subject and object, had melted away. You are merged with it, in an act of true communion; and you *know* the secret of its being deeply and unforgettably; yet in a way which you can never hope to express.<sup>1</sup>

Once the outgoing activities of body, heart and mind are stilled, the aspirant toward deeper levels of life penetrates still further beneath the surface in his effort to achieve the second stage in the process, namely "meditation." Within this stage are several clearly defined steps. Similarly as with the process of concentration, this second part of the process of inward stilling denotes not inactivity or negative passivity, but increasingly intensive activity of an inner nature. This further develops, when actually accomplished, "the functions of the inward eye operating in the suspension of the mind."<sup>2</sup> The exertion inherent in the process of concentration yields gradually, throughout the second stage, merging into a state of receptivity.

There are many ways of undertaking meditation, none of which calls for description here. Any analysis which would be fair to this subject, vast in itself, would carry us too far afield. Suffice it merely to mention that meditation is not an act, but rather a process composed of clearly marked, progressive steps, usually seven in number. Of the various guides available regarding the steps of meditation, that which seems to the writer the most practical, most suited to, and acceptable by, the Western mind, is the one in use at the School of Applied Philosophy in New York.

Concentration and meditation in the mystic's pattern culminate in contemplation, if the discipline of silence is carried through to its conclusion. In the high state of contemplation the goal of separation from the external world and of absorption in and at-one-ment with other and higher worlds is accomplished.

The attitude of the mystic toward his goal, reached through contemplation, is to be seen in the following tale recounted by a medieval mystic, Meister Eckhart. A learned man came upon a ragged hermit, upon whose face he read peacefulness and contentment. Upon asking where the hermit came upon his riches, the latter replied:

"My soul is my kingdom, for I can so rule my senses inward and outward that all the desires and powers of my soul are in subjection, and this kingdom is greater than a kingdom on earth."

"What brought you to this perfection," the learned one asked.

"My silence, my high thoughts, and my union with God. For I could not rest in anything that was less than God. Now I have found God; and in God have eternal rest and peace." \*

From one point of view concentration, meditation and contemplation may be regarded as three separate processes. On the other hand, they may also be seen as three parts of a continuous process, with each part ushering in and blending into the next. Even if the pattern is not followed through all the way, the individual steps yield values to the extent that they are actually achieved. Thus, concentration may be gainfully employed both as an end in itself and as a means to a further end. When used for its own sake, it is at least good mental drill and conduces to good mental habits.

¶There is much in the spiritual training of the Christian mystic which corresponds closely to Yoga doctrine in Hinduism. There also we find emphasized the practice of silence in its three stages of concentration, meditation and contemplation, as a means for bringing about separation from the apparently real world to reach that which is regarded by the Yogi as the actually real world. To check the outgoing current of mental activity, he undergoes strict self-discipline. He concentrates upon some object or idea, to the exclusion of all else, retrieving the attention whenever it wanders, and guarding against its dissipation by the association of ideas. The Yogi too has discovered that the centrifugal tendency is normally so strong and insistent that it requires unremitting effort to counteract.

¶The aim of Yoga practice being to restore the "identity between the self and the universal spirit," which is precluded by absorption in the external world, the training is devised to aid the seeker to rid himself of the illusion of disunion. In the stillness within the recesses of his being, there takes place "the stripping away of the accumulations of the personal self which interfere with the

realization of oneself as an organ of the universal spirit and an agent of its activity.”<sup>4</sup>

“Entering the silence” has become a popular pursuit in recent decades among those attracted by Eastern Yoga practices. It has become too popular, in fact; or rather, it is too lightly undertaken in most cases, without appreciation of the highly charged currents which may be tapped, and which require discrimination in handling. In other words, there are dangers involved in these apparently harmless, and undoubtedly well-intentioned exercises—the very dangers which the mystic meets in his struggles and which even he, with all his self-discipline and ardor finds it no easy task to overcome.

The insufficiently guarded practice produces a negative state, according to all students of the subject, a state of vacuity, lawlessness and self-indulgence, which may be actually injurious, and which surely leads away from, and not toward, valid goals.

Such a state is less worthy than the superficial uses of silence, since these do not as a rule claim to be lofty endeavors. It is more often than not, the solace of frustrated effort and ambition in the world or the failure to realize the greater objectives of meditation. Thus it is frequently compensatory and is devoid of the wholesome and progressive quality of the positive state.

Dr. Silberer denotes the two states, or rather the two paths of the process of turning inward, as active and passive introversion respectively—modern psychological terms for an ancient practice. Clearly recognizing the values of mysticism, he states that it is *active* introversion, the positive state, which is the beginning of true mysticism. He also uses the term intro-determination, to indicate *conscious* turning inward and *conscious* func-

tioning in this direction, and associates it only with the positive type of introversion.

The wholesome and constructive character of *active* introversion is to be judged by the fact that some of its by-products are an amplification of personality and a better orientation to the external world. On the other hand, *passive* introversion frequently verges on the pathological, serves to dissociate destructively the individual from his environment, involving a shrinkage of personality. It is a step beyond the mere silence of "escape from reality" or day-dreaming, but a step further into the quicksands. It is such "miscarried mysticism" which brings in its train the dangers of lawless individualism—the negative, even though more popular, form of "entering the silence."

Discussing the dangers of passive, unconscious introversion from the psychological viewpoint, Silberer writes:

Introversion is no child's play. It leads to abysses, by which we may be swallowed up past recall. . . . In [passive] introversion the libido sinks "into its own depths" (a figure that Nietzsche likes to use), and finds there below in the shadows of the unconscious, the equivalent for the world above which it has left.<sup>5</sup>

Inasmuch as "passive introversion is an excellent road to lazy fantasying in a regressive direction,"<sup>6</sup> the quality of silence essential to active introversion has always been a deep concern to spiritual leaders. Knowing well the all too-ready tendency of human nature to follow lines of least resistance in the practice of silence, as well as in all other disciplines, they have always given careful instruction in spiritual exercises, like the progressions in

retreats and the steps of meditation, to maintain the constructive direction.

It is in this connection that the mystic and the spiritual teacher have much to gain from a study of the subconscious, when explorations already being made into its deeper areas shall be more widely known. Judging from the investigations already made by Silberer, Jung and others, it is probable that much will be found in these less accessible areas which is neither derived from, nor oriented to, the three-dimensional world, but is related to other conditions. This is one reason why psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on organic origins and influences, is perhaps less equipped to plumb these depths. Its point of view is too limited and moreover, it is more concerned with the *sub-* or *ab-*normal than with the *super-*normal. The perspective of philosophy is needed for the explorations in question—the wisdom which includes far greater reaches of the human organism than the body and even the emotional and reasoning faculties. It may be, however, that some of the techniques of modern psychology, such as dream analysis, can be adapted to the wider scope and will yield a scientific key to the *supersensuous* life.

While this life is not so readily contacted as those practicing the popular “meditation” or “entering the silence” may hope, yet there is ample ground for believing it is within the reach of all right seeking. Time and again we are assured that “the pure in heart” will not be denied. Jacob Boehme, the famous German mystic of the Middle Ages, is one authority for this. Asked by a pupil how to attain “the remote spiritual goal of the supersensuous life,” Boehme countered with the assertion that it was not remote but was actually close by, if we but knew it. “When you can lift yourself for one moment,” he replied,

"into that realm where no creature dwelleth, you will hear what God speaks. It is not far, it is in yourself." <sup>7</sup>

Among the monastics, the secluded orders like the Trappists make more of the interior life for the sake of the supersensuous than do the other orders. Many of them have had mystic experience. The practice of silence is so assiduously cultivated because of its aid in "tuning out" of the external and into the interior life. Hence too the withdrawal of these orders into secluded and inaccessible spots. The mystic in general, as already shown, does not always thus literalize his seclusion.

The further evolved the religious participant in practices in which Silence is so vital a part, the better he uses the results of his discipline to reconcile the external and inner worlds, and the better he relates himself to the environment, as previously illustrated. The understanding he has gained from the intensive labors within himself is often applied objectively and to the collective good.

Bergson explains the advantage of the reciprocal movement between outer activity and inner development thus, "Experience shows that if, in the case of two contrary but complementary tendencies, we find one to have grown until it tries to monopolize all the room, the other will profit by this, provided it has been able to survive; its turn will come again, and it will then benefit by everything which has been done without its aid, which has even been energetically developed in specific opposition to it." <sup>8</sup>

To the mystic the external and inner worlds stand in relationship to each other as do two sides of a medal or the two curves of a circle. That is to say, all being is for him in reality unified at its roots, and he regards the

terms external and internal merely as conveniences for describing two aspects of a continuum.

The Trappists in their kindly relation with the outside world, their self-reliant community life, their benevolence and hospitality, and last but not least their longevity, exemplify among the monastics the best development of Western mysticism, as regards its orientation to the world of men. Their devotion to other realities lessens in no way their responsibility to those who follow mundane paths.

This sense of service is no doubt a result of the Christian influence with its democratic ideals and human sympathies. The Eastern mystic seems to be less impressed with the need for the return of service to this world. To the Western mystic, however, this return is a kind of natural outgrowth from what he considers the exalted privilege of his experience of "otherness." Shall he who has received so generously, stint of his giving? Shall he withhold his labor—his life even—when he has been granted that which to him is so much more than physical life; when moreover, he has full faith that reward in mystical directions will not be denied him, if he continues worthy, regardless of the fate of his flesh?

In any event, an extraordinary willingness to sacrifice for the good of others appears to be a by-product of extended consciousness and to accompany the profounder uses of silence. If we credit even a fraction of the mystic's claim as to the renewed power and strength he receives from his meditation and his "practice of the Presence," we have a clue to what sometimes seems his superhuman achievement. It is no detraction from the accomplishments of a Loyola, a Francis Xavier or a Joan of Arc

to say that the mystic without a very real infusion, either from within his own depths or from sources outside, could not be the figure he or she is, the hero or heroine inspiring men to other than physical victories.

In this connection we should remember that the mystic has first to win the victory over himself, that is, to silence his whole egotistic lower nature. And from one point of view, this is the greatest achievement of all. In the struggle with himself he comes to know the laws governing human life; as a Sufi teacher expresses it—a knowledge most necessary before attempting to effect changes in the external world. This teacher explains the relationship thus:

However sincere the desire might be to serve humanity, and "leave the world better than he finds it," it should be clear that the surest mode of achieving this lies in the improvement of himself. He must first create peace in himself who desires to see peace in the world at large. The most arduous labours in others' service bring little real result without first possessing that peace within which he desires to see without.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout genuine mysticism there runs this strain—that the need of the soul, first and foremost, is a clear view of reality. The mystic is convinced that therefrom right action will flow. Bergson often comments on this essentially active element in true mystics. Discussing the healthy form taken by the expression of inward growth in famous mystics he says:

From their increased vitality there radiated an extraordinary energy, daring, power of conception and realization. Just think what was accomplished in the field of action by St. Paul, St. Theresa, a St. Catherine of Sienna, a St. Francis, a Joan of Arc.<sup>10</sup>

Such comment, based on the facts in the case, would seem to indicate the error in popular thinking that all mystics are visionaries and impractical persons. On the contrary, they would seem to possess the qualities of vigorous, supernormal mental healthiness. If the possession of supreme good sense is a mark of greatness, these mystics must be numbered among the great in history on that score alone.

We find the concept of intelligent turning inward for the purpose of better subsequent externalization being reiterated by other modern thinkers, who state in varying ways that man must strike a balance between external and inner activity for healthy living. Stress is being laid increasingly on the privately experienced, individually reached aspect of religion, in order to weight the scale properly on the side of inward activity.

There is increasing appreciation of the values of mysticism, or rather, the experience that may be obtained through the constructive use of silence. Even the crude, precipitate attempts to "enter the silence" and the superficial, undiscriminating meditation widely prevalent, point in this direction. It may well be that in many cases a more cultivated practice will succeed the naive, and that genuine and useful results will ensue.

This new interest is in marked contrast to what was the "modern temper" not so long ago, when a withdrawal from "reality" was treated with scorn and contempt. The demand for action and more action is now being supplemented with a demand for reflection, wider perspective, awareness of hidden factors, so that when action is taken it may be governed by foresight, not impulse, by knowledge of a situation's inherent dynamics, not wish.

Professor Hocking of Harvard relates this wider base

for action to "the principle of alternation."<sup>11</sup> According to this principle, that life is most effectively lived which at intervals withdraws from the scene of action to the scene of contemplation. He recognizes the note of futility and self-defeat which accompanies absorption in details and action. Maintaining that there must first be an integration of the parts of the human being through silent reflection, as far as this integration is possible, he believes that then and not before then can treatment of the parts be effective. According to Hocking, attention that is confined to partial and fragmentary realities separates us from the whole. Thus, he says, we unconsciously live by half-truths, condemning to death a certain margin of our consciousness. These marginal regions, which are vague and misty when practicality consumes the individual, emerge into clearer reality when he deliberately undertakes to remove himself from the battle and contemplate the whole. The "principle of alternation" is based on the concept that the active, constructive life is one of rhythms—consciously and purposively induced by the thinking individual.

It is interesting that one of the leading pragmatists, John Dewey, has come out in criticism of the exaggerated externalism of the present day. As quoted by Dr. Charles Brown, of the Yale Divinity School, Professor Dewey considers it the main defect in modern American life. The implication is that unguarded extroversion is as harmful to the individual as the spendthrift habit is to his purse.

Another important modern re-statement of the need of the individual to withdraw from worldly pursuits in order to develop inwardly, is that of Professor Whitehead. His emphasis on the necessity for cultivating the

interior life, in solitude, also lifts into prominence the constructive aspect of silence. "In the long run," he writes, "your character and your conduct of life depend upon your intimate convictions."<sup>12</sup> How else can the individual become aware of and test these except he become a silent listener to inner promptings? Defining religion as "the art and the theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself and on what is permanent in the nature of things,"<sup>13</sup> he too gives new emphasis to the age-old premise that there are such things as eternal aspects to life, and that they are primary. The discernment of "what is permanent in the nature of things" is born in the depths of Silence. Accord with the root-system of life becomes accessible only through this recognition.

Thus we find that whether the approach be ancient or modern, Oriental or Occidental, via the heart or via the mind, emphasis is laid by stalwart thinkers everywhere upon the distinction between the external and "inner" worlds, with access to the latter to be gained only through the right kind of silence toward the former.

While this is primarily a religious concept, its usefulness in the practical world is beginning to challenge non-religious attention as well. Modern thinking is turning to "inner" experience, individually arrived at, as a wholesome practice, leading to effective results in a concrete world.

The modern revaluation of religion as an individual, inward experience is thus well summed up by Professor Meland, who describes it in terms of worship:

Worship is living in vital relationship with the wealth of objects and events in our environment, and more particularly, with that most important object or event in environment

which religious language terms *God*. Worship is not an exercise apart from life, but one of the important rhythms of life. Worship is not merely a social function set apart for periodic public occasions, but a solitary adventure into the reality of the self and its environing relations. Worship is a strenuous and arduous search for facts and values, and a vigorous adjustment to those facts and values.<sup>14</sup>

## CHAPTER VIII

### SILENCE AS A CHALLENGE TO AUTHORITY

There are many paradoxes about the practice of silence. One has already been suggested, namely, that such ulterior grades as belong to the greater mystic may be exercised in the midst of the material world, and of personal, mundane activity, including speech.

Equally paradoxical, or more so, is the susceptibility of the practice to becoming a breeding ground of conflict with authority—a challenge to its ideas and the categories it recognizes. A questioning deep enough to constitute such a challenge grows not out of the more superficial and passive forms but out of the profounder, active forms, and is indeed one indication that there has been sword play of heart or mind, and that a champion for a new light has been developed.

From its very nature the grade of silence which represents the stilling of the call of the world and the withdrawal into the self for the attainment of religious experience, is an individual process. Help may be given by friends and teachers, but the walking must be done with one's own two feet. The grappling with the problems, conflicts and doubts which assail the earnest seeker develop his calibre and courage, if we are to judge from historical record. Thus the lone travail is richly rewarded.

The struggle is one in which all intelligent beings take part in some degree, however small. It may not be consciously toward religious goals. It may be only a vague

striving to preserve an inner life of some kind against the voracious demands of a practical environment. The religionist meets an intensified form of this struggle, and if he achieves victory, that is, security of inner values, he has also established a fortress, as it were, from which to repel attacks. Of these attacks the more obvious may be the allurements of materialism; the more subtle, the influence of popular creed and narrow dogma. The developed religionist is equally immune to all.

The extensive use of silence has always seemed to him a satisfying means to spiritual discoveries—more direct and far more compelling than the road of preachments and books, though these may serve the masses. In other words, he has no quarrel with authority *per se*, but asks only that it guide him as far as it can, yet leave him sufficiently free to develop his own inner life.

But, of course, there are dangers in a process so elusive to review and supervision—dangers first of all to the participant, but also to authority. Here is meant legitimate authority, exercising a needed function, and understanding the possible advantages of latitude discriminately given.

Some of the dangers to the individual have already been commented upon in connection with the untrained and unguarded uses of silence. We have seen that these open the door to negative results, ranging from fruitless fantasy in the more superficial uses to mental aberration in the more intensive practice. Our inquiry at this point however is concerned neither with the obvious nor with the extreme types of danger, but rather with those in between—the weak achievement, the easy goal, above all, the mediocre or incidental experience mistaken for the exalted.

The uncharted seas embarked upon by the untrained and undisciplined individualist ordinarily yield up no sign whereby he may judge whether he is steering toward safe harbors or reefs. With only honesty of purpose to guide him, how is he to discriminate between the true and the false on his solitary journey? How is he to know whether the structure at which he arrives is grounded on the rock of truth or on the shifting sands of illusion? If he attempts to judge of what is truth in terms of the part supplied by his own experience, he commits the pragmatist's fallacy. This temptation besets him who confines himself to the situation in hand and interprets it by his own standards, apart from history. He is thus tempted to make of himself his own absolute.

Aware that such dangers as these are likely to beset the lone seeker, organized religion has insisted upon obedience to its authority. The Church has set up its dogma as the arbiter between the true and the false, between right and wrong in religious interpretation. On the whole it has regarded the use of silence—the independent, individual use—as “an invitation to the devil,” a course which may produce heresy on the one hand as a menace to organized religion, and insanity on the other as a menace to the individual.

Of course, the Church as an institution is preoccupied with mass needs, and this attitude is doubtless warranted so far as the general practice of silence—or any other independently pursued course—is concerned. But it is inevitable that under these circumstances the needs of the more highly developed, or otherwise outstanding, individual have often been sacrificed. In any event, the battle has raged down the ages between individualism

and authoritarianism, the former with its freedom-giving qualities, the latter with its safety.

Modern religious thought is becoming more conscious of these problems than before, and more dispassionately so. It seems more willing to admit that there may be merit on more than one side of the conflict. Thus a part of the Church, as we have seen, has become more friendly to the use of silence, examining into its values, and even making a place for it in the services. Those churchmen who recognize constructive values in the practice regard its possibility of achieving religious experience as worthy of full opportunity. They believe that lack of the opportunity for such emotional satisfaction may render the Church superfluous to growing numbers, especially to those who have sought just this satisfaction in the Church.

On the other hand, there are those in the Church who see grave danger in allowing and encouraging the individual to go off thus independently. The more conservative among them see such trends as threatening actually to undermine the authority of the Church, and if not so far-reaching, then as taking over one of its main functions, namely that of guide and teacher. If the individual can discover aspects of truth by himself, does not the Church become correspondingly less necessary? Those of the churchmen who believe in the affirmative answer to this query feel that mass needs demand preference over individual needs, lest the institution become superfluous.

When the Church itself has taken in hand the problems of silent worship it has not overcome the difficulties inherent in it. Much remains unsolved, both from the point of view of the participant and the congregation. Neither flexible formalism nor formlessness, i.e., mere freedom from the restraints of imposed forms, has been

found to be the solution in this struggle between individualism and organized religion. Neither has been able to guarantee constructive results from the mere practice of silence. There is as grave a danger that the spirit of prayer be lost in freedom as in rigidity. Periods of sterility and aridity are as much a part of the history of Quakerism, whose formlessness is traditional, as they are of the more formally organized religions. Nor, again, does the use of silence necessarily eventuate in life-giving experience in those more formally organized religions which have provided a definite place for it in their rituals.

When the watchful eye of outer authority is withdrawn, there is a two-fold danger. Silence may not only lead away from the path of intense, sustained inward activity, and degenerate into aimlessness and negativity; but there is also the possibility of each worshiper setting up for himself individual concepts of truth which run counter to those of others and to organized religious thought. It requires a delicate adjustment for the Church if it is to provide the opportunity for individual religious experience without at the same time making itself superfluous; and for the individual, if he is to participate in organized religion and yet obtain deeper satisfactions than it has given him.

The signs of loss of the Church's power are today too many to be ignored or set aside. If it is seeking to regain that power, especially among the more highly developed of its adherents, it faces the challenge to find the right relationship to the searching individual. Dr. Frederic Fleming, the rector of Trinity Church of New York, writing in the *Trinity Year Book* of 1936, says that despite the great activity of organized religion, "there is no part of the Church of Christ that has not failed lamentably

in its witness and ministry in these recent years—the impotence of the Church is the worst failure.”<sup>1</sup>

He follows up his radical criticism with an equally radical and daring proposal. His recommendation is that there be a cessation of preaching, so that the spiritual significance dwelling within each individual may be realized by himself. He asserts that he seriously believes “the Christian Church would once again bring salvation to the world, and begin to save its own soul, if it had the wisdom and courage to declare a moratorium on preaching for a period of one or two years.”<sup>2</sup> He feels compelled to suggest such a departure from traditional procedure because of the emptiness of the latter, and because he believes the old forms are defeating their purpose. Thoughts like these—“We are plagued by a spirit of aimlessness. The gospel of Christ for us has lost its sureness, its courage and its authority”—seem to force Dr. Fleming to suggest a wholly different procedure.

When because form has obscured content some of its own officials admit the loss of the Church’s authority—for Dr. Fleming does not stand alone—then the indication is that a movement toward revaluation is stirring. Will that revaluation be directed against Christian teachings or against the Church’s interpretations and presentation? In most cases the latter, for there seems to be a general appreciation that the teachings themselves, apart from accretions of dogma, meet universal needs and are based upon enduring principles. Indeed, much of the unrest is in the quarters from which come insistent calls to “go back to the religion of Christ,” to use a purer, simpler form of doctrine, and to link it up more directly with the life and experience of the communicant.

A certain gap between what the individual has a right

to expect from the Church and what it actually gives him was implied in Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler's recent statement on the apparent futility of traditional religious procedure, "We are forced to ask ourselves why it may be that religious faith and religious principles and the morality which we depend upon seem to count for so little in influencing public policies and shaping the conduct of the individual life."<sup>3</sup>

Awareness of the gap between knowledge and conduct is stimulating efforts to narrow it. The very disparity between faith and action, is prodding clergymen to restore a dynamic character to religion. Many of them believe that only to the degree to which the genuine spirituality of the individual is fostered, will organized religion thrive. Thus it is that progressive churchmen like Dr. Fosdick and Dr. Fleming in this country, Professor Otto in Germany and Professor Will in France, have urged methods which will nurture the inwardness of religion. The intelligent, guided use of silence is emphasized by some of these men as a means by which the individual can "regain his soul," and thereby gradually restore a living quality to the Church. Only as the individual is given the opportunity to plumb his depths, say these theologians, does he become a really integral part of the Church. They see the Church as gaining, not losing, by the increased self-activity. They fear no threat to its authority from the seeker for experiential truth. They fear more the displacement of the Church because it fails to satisfy emotionally, mentally and spiritually, than because the individual worshiper does not need the institution. On the contrary, they see the individual quester making fuller and more intelligent use of its teaching and guidance. They believe he needs direction in his search, aid in discriminating between the

false and the true standards of progress, help in recognizing the real, though not always obvious dangers of unbridled individualism.

These clerical leaders, and others without their partisan interest, view the institution of the Church as essential to the understanding of eternal verities. They see it as furnishing the plumb-line for the building of the religious structure. They realize that the individual himself must erect the building, but maintain that it must be within the plumb-line if it is to endure. They expect of the Church that its interpretation shall be comprehensive enough to embrace all experience of truth however attained.

Such an understanding of the vital, reciprocal relationship between authority on the one hand and individual functioning on the other, recognizes the indispensability of both, and is a generous step toward closing the gap between knowledge and behavior.

The right practice of silence must be cultivated, many theologians believe, in order to make religion a living force—a goal which shall be as vital a part of modern religious idealism as it was of first century Christianity.

Those among the churchmen who see clearly the need both for authority, with its guidance and instruction, and for the first-hand religious experience attainable only by the individual in the silent recesses of his own being, desire to bring these two powerful forces into alignment with each other, that they may complement each other in the quest for that which is universally and eternally veridical. As Professor Etienne Gilson has ably pointed out, truth is not a personal affair, but its discovery is personal.<sup>4</sup>

To keep the impersonal, universal character of its truth unsullied, immune from localization in time, or country,

or creed, should be a paramount function of the Church. However, verification in experience of its teachings can never be other than an individual process. Intelligent collaboration between the Church and the seeking individual is seen by many as the ideal solution of the conflict between authority and individualism.

In this battle Silence has always been a powerful ally on the side of individualism. The lone seeker tends to see dependence upon authority and creeds as a static reliance on the past. To him it implies the worship of spiritual truths, once revealed to man, but now thought of as being no longer individually accessible. His dynamic concept of religion implies the reverse—that revelation is a spring that still flows, having never dried up. He disdains the inertia which is likely to accompany looking backward, and decries the fears and disputations which go with authoritarianism as ordinarily exercised. He sees only that as worthy of cultivation which aids the individual to participate actively in God's majestic scheme through his own first-hand, moving experience. Thus only is it possible for him to become receptive to the constantly, the continuously and not only anciently revealed aspects of God's nature. Hence his frequent disregard and even contempt for outer authority.

The religious philosopher in many a tradition has known how to steer between the Scylla of authority and the Charybdis of individualism. He has instructed his followers in the ways of Deity, which he declares are in agreement in different religions though they may be differently presented; are confirmed by the leader's own experience; are capable of verification by the growth in spiritual stature of the aspirant; and are wholesome and progressive in their operation when put to the test of

practical living. That is the extent of the authority he exerts. The process itself—the application of these instructions, the experimental knowledge of their validity—is individual.

It is claimed that the actual steps of the process *must* be individual, for the pace differs for everyone. That which is held true for all are the basic principles governing spiritual growth. And these are the only aspects of religion, according to the religious philosopher, with which authority should concern itself. He sees the ultimate goal as a spiritual one, and as being the same for all. But without instruction regarding the nature of that goal there would be no standard by which to judge and to verify the right relationship between the parts and the whole, between the individual and his place in the total scheme of things.

Wise leaders—Pythagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, Loyola are a few—who have counseled that there need be no battle between individualism and outer authority. They have maintained that religion, to be rightly and fruitfully lived, requires both. The quality of uniqueness which is inherent in everyone's approach to everything, demands satisfaction. Without it, intellectual, outer authority strikes no deep roots. On the other hand, in the absence of verified and verifiable knowledge as the foundation stone, individualism stands in danger of building on the shifting sands of mere opinion.

It is a familiar record, writes Professor Charles Bennett, that with the growth of ecclesiastical organization and systems of dogma the early enthusiasm of religion first dwindles and then disappears. "The natural gestures of the spirit," he continues, "give way to a formal ritual, the immediate convictions of personal insight harden into

an authoritative creed, the distinctive movements of the religious impulse become uniform and automatic.”<sup>5</sup>

The balance between authoritarianism and individualism, permitting both their rightful place, was actually found in many an ancient sect by means of the *regulated use of silence*. Outer authority, in the form of instruction about principles and right practices came first. Silent receptivity was enjoined as an aid to effective listening. Among the Pythagoreans, the Essenes and the Therapeuts, it was customary for the members of the groups to listen to their spiritual guides in silence. The ordinary wrangling and disputation of intellectualism were replaced with reverent quiet during and after the exposition of principles.

Far more important, however, is the rôle played in these ancient sects by silence as an aid to the individual in confirming the truth of their leaders' teachings through first-hand experience. Authority rooted in the rock of truth, and serving that truth with more than lip service, has nothing to fear from the individual seeker, however penetrating. On the contrary, such authority has every reason to welcome his exploration, as did the spiritual teachers of old.

The emphasis on silence as handmaiden to individualism is perhaps most clearly to be seen among the Quakers. Since the core of their religion is their belief that divine inspiration is a continuing, immediate reality, their practice is bound to be one which helps make that inspiration a first-hand experience. To their way of thinking, no procedure can so effectively bring it to pass as waiting together in silence—a group activity with perhaps differing individual goals but all within the one same large goal. Contrasting the Quaker procedure with the authori-

tarian viewpoint of traditional theology, one of their writers of today says that it is obvious that the static conception of worship, that is, a conception requiring the listening to the expounding of past revelation, cannot be permanently satisfying to people in any period who come to take seriously the conviction that genuine intercourse between God and man is both a permanent possibility and a precious actuality. "Such persons," he maintains, "may cherish the record of earlier revelations, but they also look expectantly for new revelations at the same time."<sup>6</sup>

The freedom given to the individual by silent worship too is held precious by the Quakers. They believe that neither word of clergy nor sacramental aids need mediate between the individual and God—that to those who are rightly attuned and receptive, God speaks directly. They strive to eliminate on their path toward God the circuitous approach which authority and creed mean to them. The power, clarity and directness of the experience which came to George Fox, and which is the cornerstone of the Quaker tradition, so far exceeded the reliability of intellectual conclusion, that he and his followers deemed such experience the great objective and the infallible guide to action and conduct.

Chafing at the bit of authority imposed by the Church of England upon its communicants, a nineteenth century convert to Quakerism who has been previously mentioned, Caroline Stephen, speaks in appreciation of the latitude and freedom attained through silent worship. "One never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning," she writes, "I found myself one of a small company of silent worshipers, who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by

any human utterance. . . . My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for communion with God. . . . To sit down in silence could at least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven.”<sup>7</sup> In saying this she is merely more articulate than other adherents of Quakerism, whose attraction to the sect was also strong because it pledged them to nothing and entrusted them with the freedom to seek for themselves.

The belief that institutionalism is concerned too much with the letter of the law and, in demanding conformity to it, pays the price of dying to the spirit, makes the Quakers perhaps bend backward in their endeavor to minimize organization. They maintain that the vital aspect of religion can operate only when unfettered by what to them are empty forms. It may even be said that such organization as they do favor is merely to provide the facilities and the stimuli of silent prayer which is afforded by the presence of others similarly oriented. Their emphasis on individualism, and on Silence as the best means of cultivating it, has remained unaltered during the course of their three hundred years of existence.

Speaking of the demand of youth today to follow only first-hand, verifiable authority, achievable only through individual effort, Professor Rufus Jones, one of the foremost religious leaders of our day, writes that their demand for demonstration of the facts is being carried over into everything that affects their lives. As a result of this training he sees youth as turning away from religion of the “ecclesiastical type” and toward the inward, spiritual, more or less mystical religion. Youth is no longer satisfied, he believes, to be told that God once dealt directly with men but no longer is it thus. Instead

of this second-hand authority, Professor Jones emphasizes the tendency of thoughtful youth toward first-hand experience.<sup>8</sup>

In agreement with the more philosophical among the ancient sects, the Quakers believe that the gap between the needs of the individual and of organized religion can be bridged through the right use of silence. The individual who learns to make the reconciliation finds himself freed from the inhibiting yoke of authoritarianism. Professor Jones conceives such a freedom-giving religion as one which can and must be verified in experience, as are laws of the physical universe.

Another important point brought out by a Quaker writer is that practice of silence makes the seeker aware of his lacks and spiritual poverty—a salutary experience which may well be lost where discourse abounds. This awareness is an enrichment of the individual, in that it spurs him on to his own effort—an enrichment which outer authority and obedience to creed cannot provide.

In Quietism, the religious movement which preceded and greatly influenced Quakerism, we see a development in which the use of silence as an aid to individualism degenerated into a hindrance to spiritual growth. It illustrates those opportunities for unwholesome experience which are fostered in the weaker types by the unregulated and untutored practice, fervid though it be.

During the seventeenth century little groups were meeting all over Europe for silent prayer. They believed they had found a truer way to God than that offered by the organized Church. Finding the inner, personal way effectual, they were led to the conclusion that they could dispense with the Church. This movement toward indi-

vidualism spread considerably and threatened the power of the Church. The question arose in a somewhat acute form that if God could be contacted in the silence of the interior retreat, what remained for the Church? As soon as the Church became aware of the quiet undermining of its authority, it proceeded to condemn the movement as heresy. It is interesting to note here that the power of the Church is threatened more by the negative use of silence than by the positive use. Indeed, in the West at least, the more valid practice has usually been anchored in organized religion.

In the beginning, under the leadership of Molinos, and later of Mme. de Guyon and Fénelon, the mystic strain in the Quietistic movement was a healthy one. It made the individual aware that revelation was accessible to him. But the movement, unrestrained by responsible guidance, subsequently ran rampant in the jungle of ignorance, and became unrelated to the world about it. Nothing could then stop its degeneration into vacant negativism. When Quietism had thus deteriorated, it went far to justify the active opposition of the Church.

The groups in the Church of England today which are loosely organized into the Fellowship of Silence do not ignore the dangers of individualism. Their appreciation, however, of the enhancement of the participant's religious life wrought during silent devotion makes them see the advantages as outweighing the possible dangers of such a practice. According to their leader, the Reverend Cyril Hepher, "this is no exaltation of private judgment or private interpretation in matters of doctrine, only the witness of the need of personal illumination in the life of devotion."<sup>9</sup> He recognizes that the problems of theology have *a place* in religion, but not *the place*, and there-

fore he adds the Quaker practice of silence to the regular church practices. He does not displace them by the use of silence, as do the Friends.

Mr. Hepher recognizes the need of the Church to provide the individual with opportunity for an experiential approach to larger realities. He is apparently trying to provide the opportunity within church regulations that would leave the more vital forces of religion unhampered to function. "No man can make a friend entirely through a third person and without any immediate personal intercourse."<sup>10</sup> From what can be learned of the religious life of the Fellowship, it would seem that it is so planned as to provide a combination of theory and practice, the salutary balance between authoritarianism and individualism. The movement represented by the Fellowship is perhaps still too new to evaluate beyond this.

In Eastern traditions we find a distinct cleavage between individualism and institutionalism, with little or no attempt to connect the two. Interest is focused on the former. But a price is paid in that, with the disregard of organization, there is also a loss of its advantage in guidance.

So deadening to the spirit, so contrary to the direction of their goal do the followers of Eastern religions regard obedience to any authority outside the dictates of "inner realization," that preaching, discourse and analysis are strenuously discouraged. The practice of silence is held essential to the spiritual growth of the individual, and little effort is expended on its regulation or direction. Herein is probably to be found the reason why in the East freedom sometimes degenerates into anarchy. It is only among the more philosophical of the religious movements of the East that the dangers in unbridled individualism are

avoided. In Eastern monasticism, whether in the Zen sect of Buddhism, in Taoism or in Sufism, the aspirant labors under a teacher, studies zealously so as to guard against the errors of self-will and wishes, and so as to bring his conduct in line with the conduct sanctioned by his particular tradition. The organization which binds together these monastic orders is as loosely knit as possible and exists mainly to provide the best environment for the pursuit of respective goals. Even the instruction and correction available upon consultation with leaders is kept within strictly limited bounds. The custom is to give little information but instead, to press upon the pupil the need to grapple with meanings hidden behind the appearance of things.

Individual development is held to be paramount and to require much silent meditation. But wise Eastern teachers have guided their pupils' practice of silence so as to bring its values to the fore and to curb, if not to eliminate, the hazards which they have always known lurk in its train. The masses in Oriental religions, however, are seldom, if ever, the beneficiaries of control and guidance, and thus expose themselves to all the dangers involved in their individualistic use of prayer and meditation. In fact, it is the very record of the abnormalities resulting from such religious practices in the East which has impaired appreciation of the values accessible through the right use of silence. Instead of silence being freedom-giving, it has a tendency to be license-giving among the ignorant, with none of the obedience to law essential to real freedom.

Zen Buddhism, in both doctrine and practice, seeks to free the individual as far as his capacity permits, to search out truth, and seems to succeed in its aim. Per-

sonal experience is the desideratum, and for this, as we have seen, Zen regards an intermediary as not only superfluous, but as inimical to the object of its teaching. According to its view, conceptual knowledge has never given satisfaction to religious yearning. The Buddhist of this sect directs his appeal to inner, individual experience and is taught to search within himself for authority in his spiritual life. For this reason alone traditionalism and institutionalism would lose their binding force. According to the Zen Buddhist, says Dr. Suzuki, "propositions will be true, that is living, because they are in accordance with his spiritual insight (that is, not merely because dogma affirms them); and his actions will permit no external standard of judgment; as long as they are the inevitable overflow of his inner life, they are good, even holy."<sup>11</sup>

Verification in experience and alignment of his own realizations with those of others who have trod the same path before him become his guide to conduct—not the word of the Church expounded from any pulpit. Piety for its own sake is scorned. As he garners the fruits of assiduously practiced silent meditation, he comes to know that true freedom of the spirit has its own principle to follow and can be advanced by no other authority.

Dr. Suzuki expresses the binding force of inner authority thus, "Freedom does not mean lawlessness, which is the destruction and annihilation of itself, but means creating out of its inner life-force all that is good and beautiful."<sup>12</sup> He refers to *Dhyana* (silent meditation) as one of the devices which keep the mind in balance and well under the control of the will.

Buddhistic belief emphasizes the contrast between inner and outer authority. It holds that an appeal to the analytical, intellectual understanding is never adequate

to comprehend the inwardness of a truth, especially when it is a religious one. When we are able not only to understand but also to put into practice all that is implied in a doctrine by having experienced it in our innermost consciousness, then, according to Dr. Suzuki, there will be no discrepancy between knowledge and life. "The Buddha knew this very well," he goes on to say, "and he endeavored to produce knowledge out of meditation, that is, to make wisdom grow from personal, spiritual experience. The Buddhist way to deliverance, therefore, consisted in threefold discipline: moral rules (*sila*), tranquillization (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*prajna*). By *Sila* one's conduct is regulated externally, by *Samadhi* quietude is attained, and by *Prajna*, real understanding takes place. Hence the importance of meditation in Buddhism."<sup>13</sup>

Zealous guardians of the vital kernel of Buddhism, the Zen sect has so organized its living that the practice of silence is paramount to all else, for through it and in it flows the life-blood of their religion. It is interesting to note that, without effort on their part, the Zen sect has been a dynamic religious force in China for the past fifteen hundred years, despite the upheavals and persecutions which have befallen the rest of Buddhism.

Similarly in Taoism, the emphasis is upon the individual realization, all that fosters it being held worthy and all that tends to hamper it decried. What stands out behind the paradoxical expression of its involved metaphysical doctrines is that The Way of the true pilgrim is solitary. Preachments and the other ordinary adjuncts to exposition and analysis of doctrine are considered impediments on The Way. He alone is worthy of emulation who knows the thesis that can be argued without

words for "this alone is the perfect or great argument, the Tao that does not declare itself in words."<sup>14</sup> Discussion of Tao would obscure its reality. "By no process of thinking, by no cogitations can it be known; the first step indeed is not to think about it, or make it the object of anxious consideration."<sup>15</sup>

Among Taoists the authority of organized religion is held in low esteem, and reliance upon its guidance is regarded as a sign of inner poverty. But we must keep in mind that those who proceed far on this Way are likely to be of greater spiritual stature than the average. Their goal is spiritual consciousness. Hence their high esteem for the fruitfulness of the practice of silence and their reliance upon it as the means whereby The Way is opened up to the individual seeker.

As expressed in one of their texts, "Those who are perfectly versed in Tao do not permit any change to take place in their Heaven-implanted constitution through any human agency."<sup>16</sup> Such a belief is inevitable among religionists who see spiritual law as primary and human law as secondary.

The Taoist strives for tranquillity and the deliberate stilling in all parts of his being which are ordinarily oriented outwardly, for only then can the principles of Tao be reflected upon his soul, much as a true image is only possible on the surface of stilled waters. By silent contemplation all that which discourse and rational processes tend to obscure, is clarified.

Silence again and again in this tradition shows itself as the medium for learning the secret which makes the seeker one with the universe. Thus the Taoist's assiduous practice of silence and his reliance upon its fruits set him at the opposite pole to the authoritarian.

The central objective of Hinduism likewise is direct, experiential knowing by the individual, without benefit of intermediaries. The Hindu religion views such a state as the fruit of a process of organic growth, not merely as a theory or a doctrine. As in many another Eastern tradition, we see here too a foreswearing of the attempt to formulate creed, to hold truth within definite moulds, to prescribe ways of reaching it—functions for which the Western mind deems organized religion and the authority of the Church essential.

The Yoga discipline practiced by the Hindu seeker is individually pursued and is intended to train the mind to "hear the mighty voice of the Silence within." While it is true that relatively few actually pursue this discipline in its full and true sense, its objective remains the ideal of the Hindu tradition. Only in the state of individual communion does the Hindu feel his identity with the universal self and "realize the Atman within himself." This constitutes religious experience for him and institutionalism plays no part in it. In other words, Hinduism, indeed the East generally, is more individualized. The West is more organized in its religious activity.

Inasmuch as the Yogis seek God in the higher potentialities of the self and not in rites or images, they make no use of these latter, even as crutches. To the Easterner adjuncts are but hindrances. Only the contemplative humility which accompanies the consciousness of absolute dependence on God, is the appropriate attitude. Even if external authority has helpful results, they still see these as a mechanical morality, lacking in the transforming quality which arises out of a vital sense of union with God. The sense of union is to them a realization toward which each individual must labor. They regard their

religion at its best as a process, a culture, a discipline, not as a creed or catalogue of tenets; hence energy expended on differentiation or clarification leads in a direction opposite to their striving. They see such effort as leading outward, toward the multiplicity of things, instead of inwardly to the simplicity at the core.

So here again we see how contrary to the religious thinking of the Western world is that of the Hindu. One Eastern writer expresses it thus, "The end of the individual is not so much the securing of happiness here on earth as the realization of an ideal, the accomplishment of a mission. This has to be achieved through the education of the individual, which involves restraint and suffering." Of course, this idea has a familiar ring to the Christian too, and it is embodied in the Christian faith; but the Christian world-outlook emphasizes it only upon occasion. In practical application it strives for amelioration in the here and now.

Through Hindu eyes religion at its best is seen as a growing tradition, not a fixed revelation. Thus practices which effect "the reunion of the devotee's soul with the universal spirit,"<sup>17</sup> hold the dominant place in their outlook. Most significant and contributive of these practices, according to their writers, is that of silence. Only by means of meditation do they consider individual realization—the essence of the Hindu religion—possible of achievement. Believing that "the faculties and powers which are his are individualized manifestations of universal forces, and that between the two there is an unbroken continuity and one-to-one correspondence which makes this life one with the Universal Life, his breath one with the Great Breath,"<sup>18</sup> the Hindu directs his energies to individual ends.

This individualistic orientation has brought with it much abuse on the part of the more immature Easterner who has not the capacity to submit to or to sustain the discipline prescribed by their thinkers to keep individualism within the bounds of wholesomeness and validity.

Sufism is another Eastern tradition which stresses individualism and deliberately sets about to loosen the mind from the bondage of authoritarianism. And, as we have seen in a previous chapter, the emphasis is placed, as a result of such orientation, on that which becomes accessible when Silence enshrouds the outer aspects of the personality. The practice of silence is assiduously cultivated so as to open new horizons to the aspirant.

Here too institutionalism and authority are reduced to a minimum and exist only for the purpose of instruction in principles and methods for the attainment of "self-realization." And it being their desire to pass on such knowledge in the closest of contact, instructions are given not from a pulpit but from teacher direct to pupil. Their tradition has it that, "The fine instructions for quickening the intuition, the only means of knowing the Absolute-in-Itself, were confided secretly and from heart to heart by the Holy Prophet of Arabia to his chosen friends."<sup>19</sup>

The inward work carried on by each pupil until it culminates in experiential knowing is as paramount in this tradition as we have seen it to be in others of the Orient. All else is secondary and is used only as a means. The authority of the teacher is relied upon to keep the search within the bounds of reason and consistency, but its only function is to serve as the shell around the kernel. "The initiate follows the path of meditation, the *Murshid* (teacher) only hands him the torch by which to observe

what he meets on his path and to guide him to the goal.”<sup>20</sup> Inasmuch as his progress is measured not in terms of knowledge, but in terms of spiritual condition, life itself is his laboratory and the study of books is relegated to the background. The path through silence leads the Sufi to his ideal of “self-realization,” and thereby to the realization in the individual’s consciousness of God, whose medium for the transmission of divine knowledge he sees as his own higher consciousness.

The Christian mystic is differently oriented in his search for values. Contrary to the Oriental seeker, he finds it congenial to stay within the bounds of outer authority. What the Church has set up as the creed is willingly obeyed, for his striving for union with God finds a solution within that mould. Through the practice of silence, and in it, he forges the link between himself and his ideal, Jesus. Creed interposes no barrier to establishing the connection between the immediate and the remote. Creed is in fact the skeleton on which the flesh and blood of his living experience hangs. No conflict arises in his heart and mind between what his Church presents as truth and his individual realization of that truth. To be in actual contact with its warming and sustaining rays is his goal.

So the Christian mystic does not revolt against authoritarianism as did, for instance, the Quakers, nor ignore it as does his Eastern brother. The Christian mystic accepts it but makes little use of it. It may be that the sense of organization, which is on the whole so much better developed in the West, has something to do with his attitude. It is perhaps characteristic of the Christian mystic’s intellectual humility that he has been willing to chart his course according to the map offered by his

Church. He has found the map more than adequate, in that it furnishes him with landmarks in his lone adventures of the spirit. But the true mystic has never mistaken the map for the journey itself. Denominational language and theology are not inimical to his purposes, hence he has no quarrel with external authority as long as it leaves him free to come to "inward realization of and contact with Jesus."

Thus the Christian mystics, on the whole, come to an easy solution of what others have seen as an inherent conflict between authoritarianism and individualism. The harmonious relationship does not always extend to authority beyond that of the Church, and history records bitter conflicts with the state when "the light from within" caused act or utterance hostile to state policy. There is the case of Savonarola, for instance. But the mystic less concerned with public affairs is not likely to run afoul of these difficulties. His activity usually revolves around his keen yearning to come to first-hand experience. Hence devout meditation upon religious goals is the path he follows. "The flight of the alone to the Alone" is the core of his religious life, and hence individualism receives the major accent.

Outside of the individual mystics and the orders employing the more active and intense forms of silence, there is little inclination toward this avenue to profounder realizations among religious people in the West. An appreciation of the values of institutionalism is characteristic of the Occident just as the lack of it is characteristic of the Orient. In any event, organized religion still flourishes in the West, and even if the life should depart from it still further than it has, the institutional forms may well remain, although perhaps more frankly as social

or educational centers than as a spiritual force. The West likes authority partly from distrust of its own individual penetrative powers, and partly because sermons and ceremonials provide a certain mental and emotional stimulus.

The East does not like authority in religious matters, though it may bow abjectly before temporal authority. The Eastern seeker looks to the development of his own powers to lead to his experience of "truth." He is convinced he has the key somewhere "within" and that there, alone, or with the aid of his teacher, will he find the key to open the door.

The problem for religious authority everywhere, East and West, appears to be for it to develop the qualities of spiritual stature—of the guide who can also inspire. Among these qualities are catholicity, comprehensiveness, openness to new techniques and hospitality to individual experiences, whether these are possible to the many or only to a few. The few have always pointed the way. Authority must ultimately incorporate such of their findings as have stood the test of time, or lose its meaning and possibly also its hold.

Authority in religious life is too significant a factor to be lightly cast aside or to become impaired because it is unadaptable. It has so much to gain from increased flexibility that it can well afford any risk incurred. Constituted authority would do well to examine more scientifically into individual religious experience and promote its increase. Such experience may yet become its treasury of power and its greatest hope for the future.



## CHAPTER IX

### SILENCE AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

The higher states of consciousness in which all spiritual leaders worthy of the name have to some extent participated, have always been in the setting of Silence to this world. Which brings us to a consideration of Silence in its loftiest implication—as a source of knowledge vastly beyond that obtainable through the senses and the reasoning powers. We have had glimpses of these fruits of Silence in our brief references to mystic experience, but the mystic, by and large, seeks rather fuel for the flame of his love and the warmth of the “Presence” than a penetrating understanding of the cosmic order. This striving is that of the philosopher, in the original meaning of the word—the lover of Wisdom. He finds comfort, warmth, and security in the cool flame of Truth—or rather in its rays, for his very knowing prevents his mistaking the one for the other.

Before discussing Silence as a source of knowledge, let us pause to glance at just what is meant by the quality of ineffability which accompanies supermundane access to knowledge. The philosopher's realizations as he advances toward the source of the rays of the flame of Truth are, it would seem, as incapable of reduction to speech, to setting forth by “tongues of flesh,” as the transports of the mystic. *After* the experience both may make attempts, in their separate ways, to externalize.

Inevitably that expression when made has been in the

form of symbolism, the language of the lesser worlds reaching toward the larger. The mystic tends to bridge the gap with poetic imagery; the knower in prose calling no less for release of the mind from bonds to the literal understanding.<sup>1</sup>

In the wisdom-tradition of ancient Egypt, the Hermetic, frequent reference is made to this quality of ineffability. One that is typical, found in the instructions of Hermes to his pupil Asclepius, regarding the beauty of the Good, is:

For only then wilt thou upon It gaze when thou canst say no word concerning It. For Gnosis of the Good is holy silence and a giving holiday to every sense.<sup>1</sup>

Silence surrounded every aspect of the religious experience in this profound mystical-philosophical tradition—the preparation for it, the state in which it was attained, its culmination, and even the form taken when the attempt was made to commit the experience to words. First, as a preparation, the senses had to be fully stilled:

For neither can he who perceiveth It, perceive aught else; nor he who gazeth on It, gaze on aught else; nor hear aught else, nor stir his body any way. Staying his body's every sense and every motion he stayeth still.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the state in which the disciple reached the consummation of his efforts was one of deep silence. Referring to silent meditation as the body's sleep, Hermes, the teacher, says:

The body's sleep became the soul's awakening, and closing of the eyes—true vision, pregnant with Good.<sup>3</sup>

And then, thirdly, that ineffability which characterized any attempted expression is indicated in such references

to God as, "Thou unutterable, unspeakable, Whose Name naught but the Silence can express"—the Egyptians' admittedly futile effort to describe the indescribable.

This same inability to clothe experience in words is voiced in the Upanishads. In the Vedas it is recorded that when the sage was asked by the king to explain the nature of Brahman, he kept silent.<sup>4</sup>

In these ancient Hindu scriptures there are frequent attempts to indicate the nature of the mystical insight by means of negatives, pointing out that it is not that which even the furthest reaches of knowledge and imagination can extend, but far beyond. The Upanishads discuss the inadequacy of the highest categories to convey the realities intended by them, so the Vedic seers logically fell back on one of two poor choices in reference to those realities—remaining silent or describing them in negatives or paradoxes.<sup>5</sup>

In the Old Testament too the ineffability of the experience of relationship with Deity is embodied in many a phrase, such as, "Praise is silent for Thee, O God."<sup>6</sup> This refers to the praise given to God in the deep stillness of the heart, as opposed to the noisy praise-giving of empty rituals—an understanding though silent praise, born out of reverence and out of the realization that speech is futile. To those claiming to be touched by the soul-stirring experience of communion with Deity, nothing seemed more natural than the inadequacy of speech.

In Sufism also there is to be noted the same implicit command to silence in the presence of that which leads toward ultimates. The significance of silence as the mark of ineffability is poetically expressed in that tradition in these words, "Verily he is twice blest who speaketh of God with closed lips."<sup>7</sup>

Sweeping the glance to our own corner of the world, remote from Orientalism, we find an American poet similarly acknowledging silence as the means to and the sign of deep levels of insight. Walt Whitman's phrasing of the same theme is thus beautifully stated in his *Democratic Vistas*:

I should say that only in the perfect uncontamination and solitariness of individuality may the spirituality of religion positively come forth at all. Only here, and on such terms, the meditation, the devout ecstasy, the soaring flight. Only here, communion with the mysteries, the eternal problems. . . . Bibles may convey, and priests expound, but it is exclusively for the noiseless operation of one's isolated self to enter the pure ether of veneration, reach the divine levels, and commune with the unutterable.<sup>8</sup>

The consistency with which mystics of all traditions refer to ineffability as a quality of their experience and bound up with its expression, caused William James to classify it as the first of the four characteristic marks of mysticism—the other three being the noetic quality, transciency and passivity.<sup>9</sup>

The voluminous writings of mystics would seem to indicate no lack of words with which to attempt to describe their experience, yet they do not, because they say they cannot, describe the highest realizations that burst in upon their consciousness. As to these the mystic is uniformly silent. He may make earnest attempts to describe them, and it is these attempts which bulk large in mystical literature; and incidentally have contributed to the confusion rampant in this field. The attempts, through imagery and through what Evelyn Underhill calls "desperate paradoxes," approach and skirt the experience, but, according to the mystic, do not really convey it.

As one medieval Christian mystic, Angela of Foligno, humbly puts it:

Of these excellent and divine workings in the soul, whereby God doth manifest Himself, man can in no wise speak or even stammer.<sup>10</sup>

Another mystic, Jeremy Taylor, describes the "state of union with the Ineffable" as one "not to be discoursed of but felt." Of this high state he says:

It is the unitive way of religion, that is, it consists in union and adherence to God; it is prayer of quietness and silence, a meditation extraordinary,—a discourse without variety, a vision and intuition of divine excellences.<sup>11</sup>

Thus we find instance upon instance wherein the profounder mystic concludes his earnest efforts to give form to his experience with the assertion that Silence, and Silence alone, is most expressive of its awesomeness.

Still more is Silence sign and symbol of the climactic experience itself. This may reach the soul-stirring heights referred to as "intoxication." Plato knew what it was and called it "divine madness." Poets have called it "the inebriation of Reality" and "God-intoxication." It is as far removed from sense-intoxication as maturity is from infantilism.

Yet whenever masses have contacted a tradition, which in its origin showed evidence of inspired leadership, they have literalized the heights of consciousness attained by their original leaders and brought them down to the level of sense experience. This type of degradation is perhaps best illustrated by the history of the Orphic tradition. In its ancient origins—so ancient that they are almost hidden in the mists of antiquity—its initiates are said to

have been seers and prophets, whose supermundane experiences were overwhelming. Crowd-ways, however, caused such deterioration of this mystical tradition in the following centuries that by the time it was taken over to Greece it had been brought down to the levels associated with the Bacchic cult. Thus "God-intoxication" was debased into sense-intoxication.

Poets too have had mystic experience, and the greater the poet the more his mystic insight. And in every age they have been tempted to the effort to express the ecstatic joy at the high point of deep realizations. Poetry abounds with their attempts. Suffice it to quote but two poets of widely separated ages and traditions, to indicate the similarity of the note they strike in their efforts to describe the climax. One is from the Persian tradition. Upon his emergence from meditation, a devout seeker was asked:

"What beautiful gift hast thou brought us from the garden in which thou hast been?"

"I intended to fill the skirts of my robe with roses when I reached the rose-tree," replied the quester, "as presents for my friends, but the perfume of the flowers intoxicated me so much that I let go the hold of my skirts."<sup>12</sup>

Walt Whitman more voluminously describes the climax of the mystic's vision in the passage previously quoted and in these words:

Alone in identity and mood, the soul emerges (from meditation), and all statements, churches, sermons, melt away like vapors. Alone in silent thought and awe, and aspiration, and then the interior consciousness, like a hitherto unseen inscription, in magic ink, beams out its wondrous lines to the sense.<sup>13</sup>

It is this same high consciousness toward which the Taoists of ancient China strove by means of the practice

of Silence. The writings of Chuang Tzu tell much about Tao, The Way, yet paradoxically he believes that the best language is that which is not spoken, or as he puts it, "perfect speech is to put away speech." Referring to Tao which does not declare itself in words, he avers, "Yet though it cannot be declared by speech, silence also is inadequate for its expression."<sup>14</sup> Here again we witness the dilemma of the philosopher when he attempts to describe something which cannot possibly be described either through words or silence. In other words, the concept he labors to convey to others is that a larger dimension cannot be contained in a smaller, nor in any way be adequately expressed by it.

Thus the Taoist found himself in the same difficulty that mystics preceding and following him seem to have experienced. Their efforts to describe higher types of consciousness seem always to come upon insurmountable barriers, so that when the description did not eventuate in silence, it found itself on the other horn of the dilemma in having to resort to negatives.

The negative descriptions of the Supreme given in the Upanishads is closely related to those found in Taoism. Both the Hindu and Chinese traditions, when face to face with that which overpowers all ordinary thought and beggars speech, describe it negatively as "No, no! Not this, not that"—descriptions capable only of conveying bafflement, yet surely suggesting much on the positive side too. In such instances speechlessness is negative in name only. The effort to clothe heightened consciousness in phrases entails a sensitivity, an awareness, a fine humility—all positive qualities in themselves, even though the result is negative.

Human speculation has always seemed unable to handle

that which is experienced but cannot be transmitted, yet cannot dismiss it by calling it unreal or imaginary. The volume and force of the testimony and the high calibre of the minds giving the evidence are too great.

According to the Taoist again, "By no process of thinking, by no cogitation can it be known; the first step indeed is not to *think* about it, or make it the object of anxious consideration."<sup>15</sup> The aspirant in this Chinese tradition who would come to first-hand realization of The Way is instructed in the science of ever greater intensification of silence for:

When a mirror or water are brought into proximity with any object, they reflect it as square or round, crooked or straight, as the case may be, with perfect tranquillity. In like manner does the heart of a wise man naturally reflect the principles of Tao. Wherefore the wise man, having transcended these limitations, does not need to hear sound and see forms; for he is conscious of both, even in the midst of silence and vacancy.<sup>16</sup>

Silence often carries a double rôle—or is it two rôles telescoped? One serves to usher in the new experience and knowledge; the other to shroud what could only be distorted if literally expressed—that is, to give sign of ineffability. Both of these aspects are to be seen, for instance, in the Hermetic tradition when Hermes, the teacher, says to Tat, the pupil:

Then only will you see the vision, when you cannot speak of it, for the knowledge of it is deep silence, and the suppression of all the senses.<sup>17</sup>

Again, the dual rôle of silence is alluded to by Apollonius of Tyana, a member of the Neo-Pythagoreans, in the following description of their practice:

In particular they kept the rule of silence regarding the Divine Service (that is, the Gnosis). For they heard within them many divine and unspeakable things on which it would have been difficult for them to keep silence, had they not first learned that it was just this Silence which spoke to them.<sup>18</sup>

Silence as a source of knowledge looms large in history—knowledge of a nature different from, and higher than, that available through sense and its images. This phase of the subject opens up consideration of such vast matters as revelation, inspiration and intuition. It also raises questions of an epistemological kind as to what is knowledge, its nature, its object, its extent and its validity.

No attempt will be made to establish either the validity or invalidity of revelation, inspiration and intuition. In all cases the illustrations given will be permitted to speak for themselves. That is, the effect upon the experiencer or speaker must be our criterion. And until we know what is the unanimous voice of those who have experienced, how can we apply ulterior standards? It is for these reasons too that quotations are more frequently used in this chapter than might otherwise be warranted. Objective description in these instances might mutilate. Subjective appraisals at least suggest the experiencer's meaning, although even these attempts admit inadequacy and remoteness.

Our inquiry will keep itself within bounds by reviewing merely a few representative reports from broad vistas and deep explorations, taking note of the rôle played by Silence in obtaining them. Every religion bears testimony to the important place occupied by the cultivated practice of silence, when carried sufficiently far, in opening up wider areas of cognition than are ordinarily accessible.

The birth of wisdom in Silence is attested in the Old Testament in many passages, among them this lofty one, "When all things were in quiet silence and night was in her swift course, Thine Almighty Word, O Lord, leaped down from heaven."<sup>19</sup> Here "night" is said to refer to the stillness of the senses, to the meditative quiet when the outer world is shut off in darkness, so that the inner way may be illumined. It is the same contemplative silence in which Hermes instructs Tat to listen to the Hymn of Re-birth—a hymn which is to be heard only when all earthly sounds are stilled.

In this profound Silence, and only in its highest stages, there comes to the tried and tested aspirant the yearned-for culmination—God-inspired knowledge.<sup>20</sup> This "knowledge of ultimate and absolutes" is seen as the foundation stone on which the phenomenal world of matter and humanity rests. Its nature is thus expressed by Hermes:

Wisdom conceived by mind in silence, such is the matter and the womb from out which man is born, and the true Good the seed.<sup>21</sup>

Such knowledge, according to this tradition, is so far beyond the range of sense-perception and reasoning as to defy all standards of comparison. It stands in contrast to the knowledge obtainable through these lower avenues.<sup>22</sup> Its nature is rather that of a mental and spiritual enlightenment, a "gift of God," which descends upon men who are freed from the illusions of the sensory world, though they may use their sense powers well, within the limited scope to which they apply. This ulterior knowledge gives "insight into reality and the purpose of existence."

In the writings of the ancient Hebrew philosopher,

Philo, we have emphasis on the same note of divine illumination made possible by discipline of the senses and concentrated direction of the mind toward steady contemplation of religious themes. He, as well as his fore-runners, the Hermetists, believed that regeneration could be experienced, but only during times of reverent silence and profound meditation.<sup>23</sup> "The most secure method of contemplating the Existent is with the soul alone, apart from all utterance."<sup>24</sup> Philo sees the culmination of the religious life in communion with God, a state called "ekstasis," as essentially transforming in character, replacing humanly acquired knowledge with God-given knowledge. The contrast between reason and inspiration, and their inability to be simultaneously present, is thus expressed by Philo:

The reason within us leaves its abode at the arrival of the divine spirit, but when the spirit departs the reason returns to its place. For it is not fitting that mortal should dwell with immortal.<sup>25</sup>

The high and complete state of silence to the outer and the lower nature, essential for such an inflow of divine knowledge, made the experience, according to Philo, a rare and intermittent one, for "most men could not keep so completely concentrated on God and estranged from the world as was necessary in order to retain the divine presence." For Philo this experience constituted initiation and regeneration. He regarded initiation as an entrance into a new world, the "intelligible world" where "the purified mind could contemplate the pure and untainted nature of those things which are invisible."<sup>26</sup>

Regeneration to him meant an actual spiritual rebirth

and a functioning in this newly established condition. It was something far different and far more profound than the meaning ordinarily attached to this term in retreats.

The group of philosophic thinkers of the early centuries of our era, known as the Neo-Platonists, comment repeatedly on the moving character—shattering indeed to all the moulds of sense-perception and reason—that marks regeneration in the states of higher consciousness. Referring to the union with God, a state he called “enosis,” which he claimed is experiential in the depths of contemplative silence, Plotinus, greatest among the Neo-Platonists, writes:

It is only now and then that we can enjoy the elevation made possible for us, above the limits of the body and the world. I myself have realized it but three times as yet, and Porphyry hitherto not once.<sup>27</sup>

The infrequency of the experience, according to students of mysticism, is especially marked with mental mystics, in contrast to the more frequent occurrence of the supernormal among the emotional type. The dynamic of this type seems to burn down barriers faster but perhaps less reliably than the slower procedure of the mental type. But then too, beyond quantity there must come recognition of the quality—the height the supernormal experience attains. The dynamics of the heart alone would seem insufficient to penetrate as far into the realm of supermundane knowledge as when we find the rare combination of the dynamics of mind *and* heart. Subsequent to Plotinus' above comment on his own and Porphyry's experience, or rather lack of it, Porphyry declared that he had witnessed Plotinus' “union with the Good” four times,

while he himself had been only once so elevated as to have had a glimpse of "the eternal world."<sup>28</sup>

Still another Neo-Platonist, Proclus, thus describes the culminating experience of "divine illumination" and the nature of the knowledge it reveals:

The initiation and final disclosing are a symbol of the Ineffable Silence, and of the Enosis, or being at one and en rapport with the mystical verities through manifestation intuitively comprehended.<sup>29</sup>

Referring to the knowledge disclosed in contemplation as attained by degrees, and absolute when reached, Plotinus declares:

Knowledge has three degrees—opinion, science, illumination. The means or instrument of the first is sense, of the second dialectic, of the third intuition. To the last I subordinate reason.<sup>30</sup>

In this analysis of the degrees of knowledge we note that Plotinus by no means sets aside sense knowledge nor the reasoning based upon it. He does, however, regard these two means of knowing as inferior and as secondary to supersensually received knowledge, or intuition. This is particularly interesting, stemming as it does from one of the most powerful intellects in history.

Dean Inge quotes Plotinus as saying further, concerning the fruition of silent contemplation and the high level of the knowledge which may thus be revealed:

In the vision of God, that which sees is not reason, but something greater than and prior to reason, something presupposed by reason, as is the object of vision.<sup>31</sup>

Discoursing upon the approach to that which is transcendent, and the sense in which it may nevertheless be contacted, Plotinus posits the question:

"How, then, do we ourselves come to be speaking of it?"

"No doubt we deal with it," he answers himself, "but we do not state it; we have neither knowledge nor intellection of it."

"But in what sense do we even deal with it when we have no hold upon it?"

"We do not, it is true, grasp it by knowledge, but that does not mean that we are utterly devoid of it. . . . We can and do state what it is not, while we are silent as to what it is; we are, in fact, speaking of it in the light of its sequels; unable to state it, we may still possess it."<sup>32</sup>

Spanning many centuries and many countries, we find the Quietist movement, in its early virility, dedicated to the same goal. With perhaps more religious fervor, even if less mental vigor than the Neo-Platonists, the Quietists' cultivation of inner quiet was for the similar purpose of opening the door to a knowledge they saw as derived from God. In an important letter on silent interior prayer, written in 1628, one of their early leaders, Juan Falconi, instructed his followers thus:

Dwell in silence, think of nothing, however good, however sublime it may be. Dwell only in pure faith in God and in utter resignation to His holy will.<sup>33</sup>

Thereby, he taught, the soul forms great virtues which grow "by interior operations that are beyond knowledge." "Then out of this silence of all flesh," he continues, "out of this calm of contemplation, in which the mind thinks, desires and wills nothing—this pure repose—divine movements will spontaneously come; an inner burst of revelation will be granted, the sure direction of divine pointings will be given."<sup>34</sup>

The Quakers who also follow the classic mystics in their doctrine of interior stilling, believe in the communicability of the revelation they may receive. This is

worthy of note, as it is in contrast to what we have seen of the mystic's reluctance, even his inability, to speak of his experience. However, the Quaker acknowledges that the spoken word is inadequate, for "beyond it is that deeper reality for which it stands."<sup>35</sup> Silent worship among the Quakers is thought of as reaching its highest possible expression when "the body breaking into speech at the burning touch of the spirit,"<sup>36</sup> shares with others of the group knowledge for which it was the vehicle. Building a path to such knowledge is considered essential to their religious life. The depth and height of that knowledge is implicit in these words of one of their spokesmen:

Silent worship can only prove itself to be a real way, real to us, not only to our forefathers, if it does truly lead us too within the veil, enabling us also to enter that Holy of Holies where each soul is initiated into its own true inheritance of priesthood, in the presence of the Divine.<sup>37</sup>

A Quaker of the eighteenth century, John Bellers, gives this penetrating description of true silent worship, which at its best is seen as culminating in the infusion of divine knowledge:

The silence of a religious and spiritual worship is not a drowsy, unthinking state of the mind, but a sequestering or withdrawing of it from all visible objects and vain imaginations into a fervent praying to or praising the invisible, omnipresent God in His light and love. His light gives wisdom and knowledge.<sup>38</sup>

The link between silence and inspiration, forged in the secret depths of the "inner man," is obvious in the Quaker tradition. Among the many who have voiced the relation between them is Caroline Stephen who became

converted to the Quaker faith and, who, let us recall, had much to do with the revitalization of this tradition in the last century. This writer phrases it thus:

How can we listen if we do not cease to speak? It is that "wise passiveness" which is essential to the possibility of serving as channels for Divinely given utterance. . . . The result looked for is the fruit of a devout intelligence first purified, and then swayed by Divine power.<sup>39</sup>

Recognition of different levels of life, human and divine, abounds in Quakerism. And the possibility, under right and controlled conditions, of establishing communication between these levels is acknowledged by all adhering to this faith. The transition to, or contact with the divine is held to come during states of expanded consciousness when "things are seen and known that are hidden to the ordinary faculties."<sup>40</sup>

This attitude implies the existence of potential mystical faculties in everyone, whereby greater realities than those accessible through the ordinary faculties, are discernible. Many a modern writer conveys this same idea. For instance, Rom Landau, in his recent book, *Thy Kingdom Come*, points out that the spiritual relationship between that which he designates as God, and man, can only be kept alive through the cultivation of the mystical faculties in man, and that it is precisely these faculties which most religions have neglected, even when they have not actually banished them.

Turning now to an Eastern tradition, we find the teachings in Sufism filled with instructions for quickening the faculty which can be made receptive to a higher guide for action than reasoning. They call this faculty intuition, and see it as inherent, though only potential,

in every individual. It is through this faculty, they aver, that the relationship between the human and divine levels of life can be experienced and thus known. As expressed by one of their writers:

The Sufi understands that although God is the source of knowledge, inspiration and guidance, yet man is the medium through whom God chooses to impart His knowledge to the world. He imparts it through one who is a man in the eyes of the world, but God in his consciousness.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, knowledge of this high nature is attainable by the God-like human.

Extensive and intensive silence is demanded of a Sufi in training, in order that he may contact, first-hand, transcendent knowledge. In silence, when "the eyes are closed to good and evil," when "the lips are silent in joy or sorrow," when "no other voice reaches the ears of the Disciple," then, and then only, can he know "the vision of God."<sup>42</sup> The distinction between those who actually attain the spiritual goal of enlightenment and those who merely claim to have done so, is aptly phrased thus:

Whoever claims to be an accepted Disciple is making a false claim. The evidence of reality is Silence.<sup>43</sup>

This concept is curiously in agreement, yet unrelated in time and space, with the ancient Hermetic tradition, as well as with that of Lâo-Tsze of some twenty-five hundred years ago. Sufism is also consonant with them in its emphasis of the profundity of the experience which Silence, self-discipline and high purpose are said to yield.

It is in the depths of silent meditation that, they tell us, "the eye of the soul" is opened, for it is only then that "the sight is keen" and that the Sufi can read "the divine law in the manuscript of nature."<sup>44</sup>

The concept of an eye other than, and superior to, that of ordinary sight is to be found in many diverse traditions. According to Pythagoras, the opening of "the divine eye" was regarded as essential to spiritual development. Writing of the teachings by means of which Pythagoras developed in his followers the higher capacities leading to deepened and expanded vision, one of them, Iamblichus, recounts:

He was the cause to his disciples of the most appropriate converse with the Gods. . . . By all these inventions, therefore, he divinely healed and purified the soul, resuscitated and saved its divine eye, which, as Plato says, is better worth saving than ten thousand corporeal eyes, for by looking through this alone . . . the truth pertaining to all beings is perceived.<sup>45</sup>

Another term referring to this extended faculty, whereby vision into spiritual realities is possible, is the Zen Buddhists' phrase, "the third eye." In this branch of Buddhism the long and arduous training and discipline in silence and solitude is for the sole purpose of opening the "third eye" to the "hitherto undreamed-of regions shut away from us through our own ignorance."<sup>46</sup> "Satori" is the name they give the awakening. By means of this new insight life becomes more comprehensible and significant. Zen does not rely on the intellect for the solution of life's deepest problems. The effort is rather toward solution by first-hand, personal experience which, according to Zen philosophy, only the deeper cultivation of silence can accomplish. Buddhist doctrine in general holds that paradoxes, conflicts and perplexities are resolved only in the chemistry of meditation—a process of which the following passage is descriptive:

The darkness of the cave itself turns into enlightenment when a torch of spiritual insight burns. . . . Enlightenment and darkness are substantially one. . . . The change from the one to the other has taken place only inwardly or subjectively. . . . These are not two separate things, though we are compelled to conceive them so intellectually. . . . Is not life one as we live it, which we cut to pieces by recklessly applying the murderous knife of intellectual surgery? <sup>47</sup>

The philosophical-minded Buddhist bases his practice on the belief that, "by meditating on those utterances or actions that are directly poured out from the inner region undimmed by the intellect or the imagination," <sup>48</sup> insight is gained into the principles governing all manifestation. This process alone, he maintains, following the teachings of Buddha, can attain to final reality, for "to obtain enlightenment is to realize in one's inner consciousness the ultimate truth of the world which forever is," <sup>49</sup>—the world, that is, of permanence, duration, as against flux; eternal truth, as against shifting appearance.

Christian mysticism presents to us very similar thoughts. The *Theologica Germanica* is one of the well-known works of medieval mysticism which lays emphasis on the tradition that human functioning in its more usual expressions must be silenced so that more of the soul can come into its own resource. The soul has two eyes, says its writer, one of which sees into eternity, while the other sees time and creatures. The author relates that we cannot see with both eyes together; the left eye must be shut before we can use the right. Or, in other words, the avenues of sense must be closed in order that the avenues beyond the senses may be opened.

With curious unanimity, and yet without apparent con-

tact with one another's beliefs and teachings, mystics of all traditions speak of the awakening of this faculty. To the Christian mystic it is as the "opening of the spiritual eye." Fear of speech about its wonders accompanies the experience. One mystic makes this attempt to capture in words the soul-stirring effects of vision through this "eye":

What this opening of the spiritual eye is, the greatest scholar on earth cannot imagine by his wit, nor show fully by his tongue; for it cannot be gotten by study, nor by man's industry alone, but principally by grace of the Holy Ghost and with human industry. I am afraid to speak anything of it, for me thinketh that I cannot; it passeth my assay, and my lips are unclean.<sup>50</sup>

It cannot be too often repeated that there is a radical difference in *nature* between ordinary knowledge and knowledge spiritually perceived. As to questions of validity, the sages and mystics of all ages reply that material measures are too small and that spiritual knowledge can only be spiritually perceived and evaluated. Their position is that whereas the knowledge whose source is sense perception and reasoning is relative, limited and subject to reversal on the basis of new findings, the knowledge attained through Silence and its consequent steps, is absolute, clear-cut, final and in agreement with knowledge revealed to those of comparable spiritual stature, however widely separated in time and location.

Troubled by the same craving for certainty and absolute authority which drives all humanity onward, the mystic seeks an infallible guide. His search differs from ordinary ones in that it leads him inward. Out of the deeps of his being he is certain that knowledge will come. Ordinary search for knowledge leads outward, tracking

down clues in the world of concrete facts and reasoning about those facts. The knowledge which comes to the mystic when his faculties are intensively developed, leaves him no room for doubt. In the state of "union with God" he arrives at a firmer conviction and greater security than the most penetrating intellectual processes would seem to yield.

Those who have earned the right to speak maintain that there are laws governing life in the areas which become accessible to the mystic, as inflexible as that of gravity on the physical plane; that these laws are universal and verifiable. Personal imagination must be guarded against and increasingly ruled out. The aspirant to "revealed" knowledge strives as strenuously to obey the injunctions of his teachers against falling a prey to such imagination as does the student in intellectual matters with regard to easy yet false logic. Here are to be noted St. Theresa's warnings to her followers regarding fascinating images which distracted them from their goals. The true mystic lives his life in terms which help establish *rappoport* with lawful yet supersensory values—a relationship unobtainable amid sense activity and its cluttering traffic.

The measure of insight achieved by the successful aspirant seems to be in proportion to the depths plumbed on the way that is alone, yet not alone, in that he has as markers the testimony of similar experiences by others, powerful souls, who have gone these ways before him.

The wiser the mystic, the more he has recognized the indispensability of intellect and reason in testing his religious experience and fitting it into a consistent whole. Their usefulness is supplementary, however, not preparatory, according to the mental type of mystic. Their part

is not in generating the experience but in serving the purpose of comparison, analysis, discrimination. The greater mystics have always acknowledged too the need of objective authority, teaching, guidance and historical background by which to control and correct individual interpretations of their experiences, and help them distinguish the true from the false.,.

Thus, the mystic's reliance on "the inner light" does not mean that every man must be his own prophet, his own priest and his own savior. As Dean Inge says, "The tremendous importance of historical facts which our creeds affirm is due precisely to the fact that they are *not* unique and isolated portents, but the supreme manifestation of the greatest and most universal laws." <sup>51</sup> He interprets the mystic's quest as one based on reason, in its best sense, not in defiance of reason. "What we can and must transcend," he writes, "if we would make any progress in divine knowledge, is not reason, but that shallow rationalism which regards the data on which we can reason as a fixed quantity, known to all, and which bases itself on a formal logic, utterly unsuited to a spiritual view of things." <sup>52</sup>

Any disparagement cast upon mystical experience by the non-mystic has perhaps as little validity as has the criticism of a painting by a blind man or a sonata by a deaf-mute. In each case the commentator is devoid of the equipment with which to judge. The non-mystic is usually unsympathetic toward the mystical type of experience, and often permits his feelings to deter his excursion into, or at least his examination of, the field of mysticism. Happily, in the interests of scientific advancement, this unscientific approach dominated by emotions is giving way gradually. The number of scholarly non-

mystics who are willing to trim the sails of their antagonism out of deference to the evidence, is growing.

Stating that knowledge is always a function of being, Aldous Huxley maintains that what we perceive and understand depends upon what we are. If we have not ourselves experienced—especially something off the beaten track—we tend to deny. In view of that average tendency, Huxley's conclusion that we are justified in ignoring most of the arguments by which non-mystics have sought to discredit the experience of mystics, would seem to be in order. Commenting on mystical experience as a type known only to individuals who choose to fulfill the ethical and intellectual conditions upon which it is possible for them to pass to another level of being, Huxley says this unusual experience does not arise out of their feelings or thoughts or volition, but is "an unnamed and perhaps indescribable consciousness of a different kind, a consciousness in which the subject-object relation no longer exists and which no longer belongs to the experiencing self."<sup>53</sup>

The permanent, consistent and universal quality of the kind of knowledge which spiritually developed persons of all times have maintained is revealed to them in Silence, and only then, has caused some to refer to mysticism as "the science of certitude," "the science of ultimates," "the science of self-evident Reality." Evelyn Underhill, one of the foremost students of mysticism today, comments that "there is no certitude to equal the mystic's certitude" and paradoxically, "no impatience more complete than that which falls on those who try to communicate it."<sup>54</sup>

Describing the nature of the knowledge supernormally received, Professor Rufus Jones, another outstanding

scholar in this field says, "the mystic himself is so overwhelmingly convinced that he has burst into a world beyond the frontiers of sense that he cares very little for proof and demonstration."<sup>55</sup>

As difficult as communication of this kind of knowledge to others, has been the attempt to more than indicate its source. In the words of Meister Eckhart, "In the midst of silence a hidden word was spoken to me. Where is this Silence, and where is the place in which this word is spoken? It is in the purest that the soul can produce, in her noblest part, in the Ground, even the Being of the Soul."<sup>56</sup>

The experience of George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, is an instance of the compelling force of the knowledge arrived at through mystical insight.

The Lord God opened to me by his invisible power that every man was enlightened by the Divine Light of Christ. . . . This I saw in the pure openings of the light without the help of any man; neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures, though afterwards, searching the Scripture I found it.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps he had seen the reference before but even if he had, it had meant nothing special and was of no aid in clearing away his doubts. Only later did his own experience establish the veridical nature of the passage. "The light of God's spirit is a certain and infallible rule," he says elsewhere, "and the eye that sees it is a certain eye."<sup>58</sup> The vision seen by that eye became basic reality to the Quakers, and with this certainty as their foundation stone, they have erected a long-lived tradition.

Thus history shows again and again wherein Silence has served sage and mystic as the gateway to stages of

consciousness beyond those of ordinary development. The greater silence opens the way to what Plotinus calls, "another intellect, different from that which reasons and is denominated rational."<sup>59</sup> In the words of St. Bernard, "It may be defined as the soul's true unerring intuition, the unhesitating apprehension of truth."

Such a concept of truth involves a recognition of two levels of truth—the relative and the absolute. The sages of all time have aimed at a progressive development which would lead them from the former to the latter. Guided by the experiences of trusted spiritual leaders, mystics of all traditions have labored to make themselves receptive to the infusion of knowledge of the nature of the Absolute. This state they have seen as requiring the "tuning-up of the instrument," the making of their vehicle—the physical, emotional and mental equipment,—more and more fit as the medium through which knowledge of such a nature can be received.

Belief that such states are possible of achievement and trustworthy is part of the heritage of all Mystery traditions. In the ancient Orphic, for instance, the body was conceived of as the grave of the soul. Accordingly, it was not until the soul was liberated from the body in the deepest reaches of Silence that it awoke to its true life—a type of life which they held to be much richer and fuller than the ordinary life in which consciousness is dominated by the senses, personal feelings and intellect.

A modern philosophic thinker, Nicolas Berdyaev, discussing the tremendous subject of revelation, approximates this ancient thought in suggesting the need for purification and heightened quality, that man may be a better vehicle for the transmission of revelation. His modern terms thus express an ancient teaching:

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Distortion caused by the limitation of the natural world and the unregenerate nature of man is responsible for the different degrees of revelation. . . . The light of absolute truth is refracted as it passes through the distorting medium of human nature. The words which express the truths of revelation are all imperfect and inadequate.<sup>60</sup>

Progressive stages in the process of developing increased spiritual stature, which in turn leads to experiences beyond ordinary levels, are attainable, according to those who claim to have received revelation, only through the disciplined and arduous preliminary training and living required. It is a time-honored concept that only that is comprehensible to the individual which he is sufficiently developed to understand.

The Hermetic tradition clothes this idea in these words, "If thou dost not make thyself like unto God, thou canst not know Him, for like is knowable to like (alone)."<sup>61</sup> The Taoist stresses the same thought when he refers to consciousness as a mirror which reflects, according to its smooth or troubled surface, the principles of Tao. The degree to which the truth of these principles can penetrate depends on the state and calibre of the individual's consciousness. Thus great labors on the self, comparable to the twelve Herculean labors, are a prerequisite before undefiled truth can break in upon that consciousness, for "To understand one must become like or in harmony with that which is to be understood or apprehended."<sup>62</sup> Likewise, this idea is contained in the Pauline doctrine that spiritual truths are only spiritually discernible.<sup>63</sup>

A modern reflection of this same thought, developed in the light of the new physics and psychology, is that we know the world only as it relates itself to our consciousness. Or, as Aldous Huxley succinctly expresses it, what

we know is conditioned by what we are. Inasmuch as "each type of living creature inhabits a universe whose nature is determined and whose boundaries are imposed by special inadequacies of its sense organs and its intelligence,"<sup>63</sup> the implication is that self-development profoundly modifies the range and nature of knowledge.

Or, again, according to Berdyaev, "There can be revealed *to us* only that which is revealed *in us*, for only that which happens within can have any meaning for us."<sup>64</sup>

Recurrent we find emphasis placed on this need for the individual to make himself of a stature which will correspond with the nature of the knowledge he seeks. The religious aspirant seeks spiritual goals, hence he strives to attune himself—his body, heart and mind—to that level. This process involves transformations of and within the self—a difficult task, yet one possible of accomplishment. These transformations can take place only in silence to the ordinary demands of the world, in the secret recesses of one's own being, much as the invisible transformations which take place in the cocoon change the nature of that which subsequently emerges.

According to Rufus Jones, it is in "the soul's inner laboratory" that the experiment leading to religious experience and to a different type of knowledge is to be made; and he considers Silence to be as essential for that experiment as is the stillness of water for the formation of crystals.

William James, father of the pragmatic school of philosophy, comments on the extension of consciousness as one of the outstanding changes the individual must make possible if he would progress, writing:

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The extension consists in an immense spreading of the margin of the field (of consciousness), so that knowledge ordinarily trans-marginal would become included, and the ordinary margin would grow more central.<sup>65</sup>

This idea suggested itself to him through certain experiences of his own. His words reviewing that experience interestingly, indeed amazingly, echo those of the mystics. His analysis,<sup>66</sup> however, gives a clearer concept of the type of knowledge which comes to the mystic than any mystic himself has given.

James' conviction of the validity of the revelation, together with the perceptual form of the experience and his inability to make articulate report, are in peculiar consonance with the testimony of the mystic. Stating it as his view that it will be a long time before we understand these alterations and extensions of consciousness, he modestly concludes:

We know so little of the noetic value of abnormal (in the sense of super-normal) mental states of any kind, that in my own opinion we had better keep an open mind and collect facts sympathetically for a long time to come.<sup>67</sup>

Berdyae夫 is another of the modern thinkers who are giving increasing attention to knowledge supernormally received, frankly calling it revelation. He sees it as revolutionary in character (reminding one of the Hermetic and Philolean thought regarding its transforming quality<sup>68</sup>), and not evolutionary, as is ordinary knowledge.

Revelation is a catastrophic transformation of consciousness, a radical modification of its structure, almost, one might say, a creation of new organs of being with functions in another world. . . . In the piercing light of revelation the barriers of consciousness dissolve, and its hard crust is melted. . . . The

conscious is raised to the level of the supra-conscious and is widened and deepened to an unlimited extent. . . . Revelation always means a spiritual awakening and it is accompanied by a fresh orientation of consciousness towards another world.<sup>69</sup>

It is refreshing to have this new and especially clarifying light of modern thought turned upon a subject which all too often has been regarded as too sacred to analyze. Yet, in view of the fact that all great religions are based on revelation, and that it has revolutionized people's way of life down the ages and altered the course of history, the subject is worthy of all that honest analysis can bring to it. It becomes the function of the scientific mind to cut through the barriers with which revelation has been surrounded by emotionalism, taboos and skepticism alike.

Inasmuch as the truly scientific mind knows no allegiance other than to truth, it enters upon an analysis of revelation, intuition and other phases of supernormally acquired knowledge without prejudice or *a priori* judgment. The scientific mind is free of the hampering tendency to believe only such evidence as supports a pre-conceived theory. This is the usual procedure of the pseudo-scientific mind, and is one which would put a straitjacket upon human intellect. If the truly scientific inquirer finds facts which do not fit into a previous theory, he is honest enough to regard the theory as wrong, not the facts. Then in turn he sets up another theory which will have a logical place for facts newly-found, but not new. In this impersonal way the human mind promotes progress. Research and experimentation will govern its conclusions, not opinion nor predilections.

The reflections of Berdyaev on the subject of revela-

tion, referred to above, follow a course very similar to that of Bergson. The latter's contribution to modern thought is based on the theory of "creative evolution," a theory maintaining that man is constantly subject to the expansion of faculties, to greater and greater realization of potentialities. The dynamic aspect of the individual, which functions when unhampered by the attachments of and to matter, the senses and the intellect, expands the range of consciousness and opens up new levels of life.

The forward-striding movement in life he calls intuition. By intuition he means "instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious (in the larger sense), capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely."<sup>70</sup> Once freed of the static influence of the intellect and analysis, he maintains this instinct can turn inward upon itself and awaken the potentialities of intuition which still slumber within it.<sup>71</sup> He sees intellect and intuition as movements in two opposite directions, the latter toward life, the former toward death, or the static. Accordingly, a more complete humanity than ours would be one in which both the faculties of intelligence and intuition attain a much fuller development.<sup>72</sup>

Bergson, championing as he does the vitalistic concept of life, regards consciousness as distinct from the organism it animates,<sup>73</sup> although it functions through that organism. While he by no means belittles or underestimates the intellect and its function, he asserts that when consciousness is in service to intellectual concepts it is inhibited and stunted. Believing that the way of human progress lies along paths springing from freed consciousness, he regards the mystic's dynamic concept of life as

more contributive to pushing back frontiers of consciousness than the mechanistic, static concept.

Referring to the extension of consciousness as "another world," Berdyaev, in agreement with Bergson, maintains it can only be understood if consciousness is conceived of as dynamic, not static. Lack of inquiry along the lines of such a concept he believes is due to the fact that most schools of philosophy and theology have a static conception of the nature of consciousness. If the findings of psychology continue to verify his thought that the border line between the conscious and the unconscious is not fixed, it is conceivable that already existing techniques for expanding and heightening consciousness will be enormously further developed.

Perception without the senses acting as intermediaries is a riddle to the empirical psychologist. But it has always been held possible by those who have undertaken certain systematic processes of meditation. The empirical psychologist may be baffled for an explanation, but life itself goes on in terms of these and many other phenomena baffling to the empiricist. Because he has not found their rationale is no reason for ignoring them. Nations' destinies have been governed by such phenomena. The facts would seem to be established. A satisfactory scientific explanation may not be far behind. A philosophical psychology, with its roots in ancient truth verified in modern experience—working in terms of a broader and richer understanding of the unconscious, would seem to hold the key.

"Unconscious" is a relative term. It means simply, not known to ordinary consciousness. That is its negative aspect. Who knows how far-reaching may be its positive aspects? Who knows from what sources its content may

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derive? Hardly any thinking individual is satisfied that the claims of psychoanalysis, with its limited, materialistic interpretation, are sufficiently inclusive.

We find ample acknowledgment, both from the mystical and the non-mystical approach, that goodly numbers of persons have down the ages and into the present, contacted a type of knowledge other than that reached by the accumulation of sense-observation and inference. It would be fatuous to conclude that those who maintain the existence of facts beyond normal cognition are either subnormal or pathological.

Judged in the light of their constructive contributions to society, they may be regarded as abnormal only in the sense of super-normality. Their achievements, their wholesome adjustment to the environment, their ennobling influence upon it, challenge attention to the progressive and salutary in religious experience, not only for the individual, but for society in general.

Fortunately for progress, discrimination is beginning to be applied to the classification of that which is away from the normal. The positive values latent in the super-normal are beginning to be appreciated. The former indiscriminate judgment of this human activity—expansion of consciousness—only in terms of its negative, regressive and unwholesome features is giving way to scientific inquiry.

The brief inquiry made here into the nature and validity of the knowledge made accessible through the right practice of silence may indicate the advantage of further investigation. Whether the new cognitions are religious experience in the narrower or wider sense is incidental. That the cultivation of deep Silence serves to open up hitherto untapped levels of consciousness and

thus become an extra-ordinary source of knowledge would seem to be well established; the evaluation of that knowledge falls outside the scope of this examination. Evaluation awaits further observation in modern experience, under conditions of scientific study.

It is interesting to note that such scholars as Professor Bennett and Dr. Silberer, both of whom have made exhaustive studies of the subject, recognize the reality of the fruits of Silence, but at the same time acknowledge their own handicap as judges because of lack of experience.

In conclusion, probably the best course to follow for procedure in this old, yet ever-new field of investigation, is that indicated by the unassailable recommendation of William James quoted above, yet worthy of repetition, that "in view of the little we know as to the noetic value of extended mental states, we had better keep an open mind and collect facts sympathetically for a long time to come."

## CHAPTER X

### A FEW PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

From a glance at Silence in its intenser practice and profounder reaches we turn now to a brief consideration of its lesser degrees and their possibilities as human resources. For him who undertakes the cultivation of silence even to the extent of the popular forms of meditation there is, as we have seen earlier, at the least a soothing and refreshing effect. Carried a little further, to the stage where a real beginning has been made in the stilling of the emotional nature by means that are not mere repression, there is correspondingly greater benefit.

Every person whose business it is to think knows how truly Walter Lippmann speaks in his book on *Public Opinion* when he mentions the necessity for this type of worker to create about himself for part of the day "a pool of silence."

One of the first steps in the practice of silence is to set yourself deliberately, mentally, to the task. Learn to accept easily and to reaffirm frequently to yourself the need for systematic exercise, if the practice is to yield worthwhile fruits. Then undertake to set aside for yourself a part of each day you can genuinely call your own. That will differ according to the life you lead. Some will find that the early morning offers the best opportunity, others the evening, still others part of the lunch hour. Some will say it is never possible to get off by themselves, but a little examination of the situation will prove

this so rarely true as to indicate that they have not really tried.

If it does not seem possible to withdraw at any time during the day, one can always get up earlier than any other member of the family, and avail oneself thereby of what is no doubt the best time of all. True, consistent early rising involves self-discipline, but it has perhaps been made clear that travel on the road of Silence calls for just that. It is a small price to pay for the enduring satisfactions to be obtained.

Lock yourself up, if necessary, in your bedroom, bathroom, cellar, attic—any place where you are likely to be left free from intrusion and interruption. Train the family to respect your wish to have a little time to yourself in which to “key out” of the day’s hectic round. Stating this wish simply yet firmly will usually accomplish your purpose better than side-stepping. When you are frank you don’t have to apologize or lay yourself open to the charge of being secretive or mysterious about your doings.

Many will find that the simplest opportunity for quiet reflection presents itself during the lunch hour or on a shopping tour. Step into a church that is open for meditation. Or you might even try a hotel; some of the newer ones have built chapels to furnish their patrons with a longed-for refuge from din and distraction. Whatever retreat you find, sit quietly and learn to relax—at first perhaps the body only. Stay for but ten minutes, if that is the most you can contrive to set aside for being alone. A half-hour is much better, and should be the mark striven for when a fuller quieting has been achieved. A longer period is still better, if you can hold your attention without a sense of strain, to turning your energies

"inward." Don't try the exercise lying down, for very few can keep their energies focused on a set task while in that position. Alert but inwardly directed attention is necessary for a wholesome use of silence.

Whenever the time, wherever the place you have found most suitable, use them to the best advantage by following a few simple directions.<sup>1</sup> Put your body in a comfortable position that will free your attention from its discomforts and strains. The posture most conducive to this physical relaxation is to sit upright, spine erect but slightly bent in at the back of the waist, eyes closed, hands placed easily in the lap, one over the other, palms upward. Legs should form a right angle at the knee, the thighs directly parallel with the floor, the feet flat on the floor, a few inches apart and pointing straight forward. Some experimenting will have to be done in sitting a little further forward or further backward, until the exact point of balance is found. Locating the center of gravity is an individual matter, and until it is established there will be the strain of unequal pulls, now here, now there. Stay in posture the entire time you are able to devote to the silent pause, so that you can be as free as possible from bodily reminders.

After establishing the posture as well as you can, breathe deeply for at least five minutes—long breaths, beginning with filling out the lower part of the lungs. Learn to inhale and exhale at the same rate, making each inhalation and exhalation a little longer than in ordinary breathing, and maintain a smooth, rhythmic flow. (Con-

<sup>1</sup> The directions as to posture, breathing and first steps in relaxation given in this chapter are bits from those used in the beginners' subjective exercise groups at the School of Applied Philosophy, New York.

trol of breath is a wide field in itself, and only a few general remarks can be made here.)

Check the state of relaxation in each part of your body. Take the tension out of your mouth, out of your forehead, out of the corner of your eyes, out of your hands, toes, knees, etc. You will be surprised how many muscles are involved, and in what unexpected places strains will be noticed.

After good progress has been made with the posture and breathing, attention should be given to the next area to be relaxed, namely the feelings. It may be well to wait with this for several weeks, but it is not necessary to cultivate perfection of posture and breathing as a preliminary, for this may take years. Check up on the state of your feelings. One look will usually convince you that there is turbulence and confusion. Dismiss regrets, wishes, loves, hates, fears, revenge, etc. True, more easily said than done, but the process can be accomplished if steadily practiced. Slough them all off for the time being. Don't be disappointed if this seems difficult. It is possible, so approach the task courageously and hopefully, and be satisfied with gradual progress.

After you have had some practice of this kind with your feelings, look to your thoughts. Stop the momentum of those centered around outer situations or the ego. Forget about the pile of jobs waiting to be done, the jobs done wrongly. Leave off worrying about financial matters for this short span of time. Sidetrack for the moment your otherwise perfectly legitimate plans for getting ahead, drop those for avenging a real or imagined wrong, or for setting the world in order. Clear the decks for inner activity.

You will find that relaxing the body is easier to ac-

complish than stilling the thoughts and feelings. The latter is to be achieved only in degree, and must be patiently practiced. Learn deliberately to reject insistent thoughts and persistent feelings. Anyone can learn to do that for a short time each day. Those thoughts and feelings won't run away. They will be there, ready to be picked up again any time you choose. In the meantime you will have had an opportunity to become at least a little more objective to them, a bit detached. That will do you good. The better you learn to do it, the more opportunity you give yourself for gaining perspective, flexibility, poise, and, not least, a sense of humor.

Never waste this precious time on regrets and self-blame. Learn to evaluate yourself rightly and justly, not putting all the emphasis on either your shortcomings or your good points. If you have a tendency toward self-depreciation, use this time to take stock of your assets. If it is the other way around, and you have a tendency to think too well of yourself, use the opportunity to remove your blind spots and begin to see yourself as others see you. Remember, no ship travels well that lists too heavily to one side or the other. Learn to balance your cargo. If you must think of your faults, review your plus qualities as a counterpoise, and vice versa. Everyone is well stocked with both pluses and minuses; do not emphasize either.

If you belong to the emotional type you will bring voltage to the task of establishing an equilibrium; if you are the mental type you will bring steadiness. Each type should cultivate the assets of the other. If circumstances weigh too depressingly, thwart their undermining effect by "counting your blessings." If everything in the world seems to be conspiring against you, remember that

while you may not be able to change conditions, you *can* change your relationship to them.

These are exercises as specific and essential for your emotional well-being as are right food, proper elimination and bathing for your physical body. Through them you will give a bath to your psychic organism as refreshing as the one with soap and salts is to the physical.

*Attitude* is of basic importance in everything you do, so utilize your time of withdrawal for setting it right. If you have been accustomed to the rôle of the shrinking violet, self-effacing, apologizing for yourself every step of the way, weakly putting forth your position, and then quickly withdrawing it for fear of being thought too forward or self-assertive, counteract this inferiority feeling with a belief in yourself and a marshalling of your strong points. Look and you will find them. Everyone has them, so don't imagine you are so important as to have been singled out for special neglect by the Creator.

Remember that if you entertain a low opinion of yourself, you invite a similar opinion from others. If your attention is fascinated by your deficiencies and failures, you draw attention to just these limitations. How can others believe in you if you don't believe in yourself? Your timidity, your fears, your lack of self-confidence are as contagious as the measles. But on the other hand, your self-assurance, your good cheer, your willingness to put yourself out for others, your good-will are also contagious. Yours is the choice as to which influence to spread.

If, however, your self-confidence is only a bluff, an assumption, its shallowness will show up sooner or later. That is the trouble with much that is built up on the basis of the "How to" manuals, and the training of the

"personality," or the behaviors, without taking sufficient account of antagonistic trends below the surface; without, that is, cultivating the roots. The causes of these trends may lie buried deep, and far-reaching work with the unconscious may be necessary before they can be dissolved. Good work in your silent periods is a move in that direction.

There are energy values in these trends, that is, values capable of a positive expression in life, and recognition that they are there may be the first step toward salvaging those values. Denial of them may only heighten conflict.

Psychoanalysis has undoubtedly helped in many cases where the conflict arose from maladjusted erotic trends, but in most people these are only a small fraction of the possible disturbers of the inward peace.

Less important to material success than self-confidence, and less obviously dangerous to good relations with the environment than misdirected or exaggerated eroticism, there are the questions of pride, self-righteousness, smugness, envy—all the "sins of the heart," which the Church has been preaching against for centuries and the schools almost as long. If exhortation could have washed them out, surely they would have been eradicated long ago. Again, more seems to be necessary than correction from without.

If, by dint of much effort, we have been successful in minimizing the cruder expression of these unfavorable tendencies, is not this something to be thankful for? It is a precious aspect of civilization. But it does not dispose of the trends, nor does it necessarily advance the peace and welfare of the individual.

In the right use of the silent period insight can be gained into the state of one's kingdom in respect to

these matters, and wise is he who faces it with a steady eye, and with a view to straightening out faults of commission and of omission, whether these will ever be apparent on the surface or not. They *will* be apparent to the progress of his soul, and in the long run, that is of greater importance. Conversely, he will be developing real qualities, which are bound to come to the surface sooner or later, and which will need no show-off fanfare to proclaim their existence.

Such growth arises out of increased integration and a subsidence of conflict, and is in turn an opener of the way to self-knowledge and the beginnings of self-mastery.

If you have been busy envying others, comparing their position with your own, recall to yourself that proverbially, as well as practically speaking, "comparisons are odious." First, they place you on the down-grade side of life. Secondly, and more important, very few comparisons are just, because they are selective. In making them you do not take into account the whole picture. You consider only those aspects of other people's lives which justify your negative purpose. If comparisons must be made, they are only fair when they consider the *totality* of the other fellow's life—its disadvantages as well as its advantages, what is below the surface as well as what is upon it. Since all this is rarely, if ever, known to an outsider, what point is there in comparisons with incalculables? Be busy instead during your silent period comparing only what you are with what you can be. A new slant on your own make-up is one of the valuable earlier intimations of the "voice of the silence."

If the building up of a fortress within, to which to retreat from the daily battle, requires the giving up of some time usually devoted to newspapers, or entails even

the occasional skipping of the day's news, what little real loss! And what really big potential gain for yourself in other, more important ways! What matter if you are not up on the latest happenings, gossip or scandal? Forego a little of the outer and the trivial in the pursuit of bigger gains. You can pick up the loose threads later.

No one else will look after the building of your inner fortress if you don't care sufficiently to give it daily attention. And without this watchfulness bricks slip out of place and require twice the labor to repair. In work of this nature nothing stands still. The inner state of affairs either goes forward at whatever pace you set or it regresses and disintegrates, at its own pace, when neglected. Haphazard and irregular attention is as bad as none. On the other hand, "If you are fortified spiritually, the material almost takes care of itself."

Beside refreshment, restoration of balance and new perceptions, the reservation of an area within which to withdraw gives you a vantage point from which to re-align the forces under your control. You have an elevation, as it were, from which you can objectively survey the lay of your land, can judge how the battle is going, instead of how you thought it was going when you were too close to it. You can begin to see how distorted was the view of the whole because of your involvement in your particular little sector. From the less personal angle you can the better see the part you play, and can make that part more contributive and worth while. You can determine where the expenditure of your energy has been wasteful, how it can be shifted to better advantage, how to summon fresh energy for a new attack on a problem.

In short, only upon withdrawal from the scene of action can you come to a more intelligent evaluation of it. De-

tachment, even temporary, makes for clarity and freedom.

With the benefit of corrected perspective, you can redirect the forces at your disposal and bring hitherto unexpressed life to the surface. It is frequently just this neglected life which causes so much trouble. Reflect upon constructive outlets for it, and you will feel an amazing lightening of the load. Also, when you re-enter the daily battle, it will no longer seem a deadening grind, because you may well have come upon angles that will change the negative outlook. Or, if conditions are too adverse, you will at least have learned how not to let them use up the whole of you.

The activity some one else has been trying to sell you, or even what you warmly wished for yourself before you had the more comprehensive picture, may now seem not at all the solution for the pent-up life. Some channel quite different may suggest itself when you consult the further reaches within. The development of the imagination along less limited lines, while yet governed by reality, is likely to be a valuable acquisition through the use of silence. And in this age imagination, controlled and harnessed, is coming in for increased recognition, educationally, socially and commercially.

The practice of silence, far from being an impractical measure, with visionary goals, actually steps up one's efficiency in a competitive world. Broader understanding and deeper insight, keener wits, increased ingenuity and initiative are likely to be among the gains which have accrued during the "time out"—all connected more or less with a more highly developed imagination.

In your silent retreat, too, you have a fine opportunity to see things in their right proportion, events in their

relative significance. Undue magnification drops away—and perhaps with it some of the personal quirks that caused it. Fancied slights are sloughed off, little annoyances seen for the trifles they are. One has only to think how that which now looms so large will look next year. You will begin to realize that "Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday."

You revalue. Thereby you heal wounds created in the heat of dispute, gain courage to undo a wrong, catch the coming mistake before it is too late, and, for once looking back to good purpose, draw the benefit from past mistakes.

Just as an exaggerated situation is ameliorated by an impartial outlook, so do unduly neglected factors come to life. He who is too careless of details, who leaps toward goals but dodges the discipline involved in their attainment, who is callous about his responsibilities and fond of "passing the buck," has the chance to become aware of the elements in himself and in the situation which he is so prone to overlook. A silent conference with himself will show up much that is glossed over by his ordinary consciousness.

Self-knowledge is the first step toward self-improvement. It outweighs all appeals for reform from without. It sets up its own call for change, and that call is not satisfied by good resolutions. The new comprehension must be translated into action. There is increasing tension until living is brought into line with seeing—and then a milestone of growth has been achieved.

As we divest ourselves of some of our barnacles we inevitably become less critical of others. Not only do we cease blaming them for what may be our own fault, wholly or in part, but we view even their indisputable short-

comings with more tolerance and sympathy. We come to understand that the causes may lie beyond their present ability to eradicate. In that we have made a longer stride toward brotherhood than any number of high-sounding phrases and gestures could bring to pass.

In solitude we might well consider how true it is that very few of us are wearied and broken by hard work, and how many rather by internal conflicts. We will see how futile it is to permit ourselves to become a battlefield for conflicting wishes and trends, which take their toll by depleting our energy, and all too often cause insomnia.

The conflicts are not in themselves a bad sign. Many of them are unavoidable in the complex life of today. But peace is the end to be sought, since the greatest progress is to be made only by the integrated organism. However, it must be an enlightened peace, one that distributes fairly our resources of energy and attention. An important product of the work in silence should be an indication of those interests, desires, attractions and drives which are closest to our essential being. These have greater rights than others, which may be valid too, but must be given subordinate place. When primaries and secondaries are better recognized, conflicts are well on their way to solution.

Thus we may realize that financial security, important as it is, is not the whole of life. We yearn for satisfactions in life, for values that do not pall, yet seldom take the time to reflect that these are not to be bought, but must be won. This is a law which applies to rich and poor alike.

How absurd to think, therefore, that the wealthy, financially speaking, are the happiest! They have worries and concerns of which poorer persons have no idea, and from which they are of course free. However great the wealth

and the worldly power that may go with it, everyone must still build values from within if life is to be worth living. The opportunity to become strong psychically and ultimately spiritually, is as accessible to the poor as to the rich. Qualities are not for sale, and therefore the most worthwhile experiences of life, unattainable without these qualities, are within equal reach of everyone. Those whose experiences have been recounted in these chapters have stated time and again that they would not exchange them for any material gain.

How precious and how worthy of your best care is your solitude, the oasis you have created in the desert of restless activity, the garden you have cultivated within the self, is well expressed by the poetic Cyrano when he tells how soul-satisfying it is

To walk in my own way and be alone,  
Free, with an eye to see things as they are. . . .  
To say:—"My soul, be satisfied with flowers,  
With fruit, with weeds even; but garden them  
In the one garden you may call your own."

In the temporary clearing you have made in the jungle of flitting and conflicting thoughts and feelings, review what you have done—and not done—during the day; not with complacency or regret, or a mixture of both, but with a minimum of feeling and a maximum of calm, intelligent examination. If an act or an idea seems to have been particularly happy, note it with pleasure and move on in your review. If, on the other hand, you have muffed an opportunity or made a *faux pas*, consider how you will improve matters when a similar situation arises in the future. Such mulling is a sort of mild weeding of your mental garden, and at the same time a planting of some good seed.

Or there may be other than personal questions which have edged across the threshold of your consciousness, demanding more of an answer than you have been able to give them as yet. Perhaps you have had difficulty in reconciling the presence of evil with the workings of a beneficent Providence. Perhaps formal creeds have become meaningless to you, but you would like to rescue for yourself the essential truths you feel must be behind at least some of them. Again, it may be that you have asked yourself every once in a while, Has life a purpose beyond the discharge of the everyday duties? Is there continuity of individual existence? Are you growing in heart and mind, or, with all your activity, are you nevertheless standing still?

You will not, in all probability, obtain conclusive answers, but the attention you can release from ordinary affairs to give to pondering on these questions will be time and effort well spent. Draw on all you have heard and read to help you, and you will be surprised how much will come out from time to time from the storehouse of your memory. This alone is good mental exercise. Even if your pondering does nothing more than convince you that these are complicated problems and that you should not accept ready-made judgments and conventional opinions, it will have been greatly worth while.

Meditation, of course, will take you further toward the answers to these and other significant questions, but as I have said elsewhere, meditation of the genuine type is a long and difficult art to master, and little that goes by the name has actually fulfilled its requirements. Meditation rightly practiced is a potent means of converting misapplied energies and psychic "leaks" into constructive power, and the effort involved is amply repaid, espe-

cially in the development of the higher mental functioning. To paraphrase Patanjali, the old Eastern teacher, right mediation sets up a counter-current to stultifying trends and liberates the individual to experience life on more satisfying levels.

The suggestions made thus far in this chapter for the exercise of Silence in its earlier, though still constructive use, are restricted to the conscious areas of the mind, which, modern psychology is agreed, comprise but a small proportion of its content. The exercises are not, therefore, highly penetrative, and will by no means reach all the snarls and difficulties in the more extensive regions below the surface. Too much must not be expected from superficial aids, though they may well be remedial for minor causes and their more immediate effects. To ask more of them may defeat even this purpose, for it is almost sure to place too much weight on limited, conscious judgments and actually do injustice, and perhaps even injury, to the less known and more neglected constituents of the self.

#### SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

While advantages to bodily health and psychic well-being are worthy enough purposes for the more superficial practice, they must never be mistaken for the larger goals. The spiritual ends of the true mystic and the philosopher are vastly beyond such objectives—far beyond anything, in fact, that has to do with the human personality. They seek the welfare of the higher man, and if there are also contributions to the lower or earth-man, that is regarded as the merest incidental.

There is a tendency these days, among those aspirants to the dimly sensed greater fruits of meditation who are

unwilling to pay the price in self-discipline, to attempt to reach them by sinking back to subconscious levels. Not that this term is always used, nor that many even have the concept of the subconscious. The promptings on which they so confidently rely may be called "guidance from above," "inner light," "the voice of God," etc. In rare instances the promptings may be of high calibre and impersonal nature. But most frequently they are outpourings from the accumulation in the unconscious, and hence personally colored. The uninformed have no way of distinguishing between subjective and objective, no tested standards for grading or evaluating the "messages" and other out-of-the-ordinary experience they may meet.

Often this child-like trust in the subconscious is a reaction against the poor achievements attained through the exercise of intellect, the efforts of the *conscious* mind. These efforts, they believe, complicate more than they clarify, and have led them nowhere. Exaggerated faith in the subconscious mind, and underestimation of the need and place for conscious functioning, entice away from the training of the mental faculties. Refuge in the subconscious, even when in rare instances it eventuates in dramatic and elevating experience, is still in the main an evasion. The "self-realization" such aspirants sometimes say they have achieved is bound to be nebulous, of little effect in character building, minutely fragmentary at best. Of course, many supplement their withdrawal to subconscious areas by a courageous and persevering ethical discipline in practical living—and that is wholly desirable and helpful to their quest. But it obviously entails judgment, selection, determination, control and other functions of the *conscious* mind.

Far from disparaging the powers latent in the hinter-

land below the threshold of consciousness, I have for them the greatest respect and even awe of what is attainable through the employment of these forces when they are educated, disciplined and have benefited from sedulously tested experience. How else can the personal and false images be detected, laws be observed at work, wheat be separated from chaff, steps of progress—or regression—noted? There is no other way for the individual to perform these services in his own interest save through the exercise of deliberate effort directed from that small portion of his mental and psychic make-up which is called the conscious mind, and which has been compared to the relatively little visible section of the iceberg above the great invisible mass below. It is in this restricted but crucial “peak” that are focused his discrimination, his control, his power of choice, analysis, evaluation, measurement, and his will.

Where there has been failure to obtain desirable results from the more intensive practice of silence, as with the later Quietists and certain of the more fanatic but ignorant ascetics occasionally glimpsed in previous pages—where the end-product was subnormal rather than supernormal—it was because the services and safeguards of the conscious mind were not brought to bear. On the other hand, the progressive and loftier experiences have never been without the benediction of the highest intelligence of heart and mind, both before and after the experience. The mystic and the philosopher may differ in their expression of that intelligence, in their judgments and acts generally, but neither would deny that the here and now, and what they do about them, are of equal importance with the “otherness” and what it brings them. All life is sacred, especially to the philosopher, and he

does not seek to destroy or belittle anything in its pattern, though he does seek to *transform* all that is not ultimately worthy. And for this again he needs his conscious mind and the best endeavors of his discrimination and will.

Yet it is only through the deeper areas of the subconscious, which are also paradoxically its higher areas, that the grander journeys are made, the more exalted conditions entered. Psychoanalysis, which has popularized the term subconscious, knows nothing of these regions nor the values to which they may open the way. It is oriented to the physical, the practical, the three-dimensional. Its outlook is confined, in the main, to the removal of psycho-genic symptoms and a better adjustment to the world. That is good as far as it goes, but life in these further areas has a different orientation, other interests, super-personal concerns. It is not, strangely enough, until the problems of the personal life are intelligently taken in hand and at least advanced toward solution, that others of a super-personal nature can be rightly understood.

A system of co-education, as it were, for the conscious and subconscious, is the requirement for success in these concerns. Such a system was employed by the true mystic and philosopher of old, though not in these terms, nor with any of the concepts of the modern psychology of the unconscious. They adventured and lived greatly, uninhibited by the narrow and reductive interpretations of psychoanalysis. But in their zeal they were likely to ride rough-shod over any trends in the personal psyche which seemed a barrier to their achievement. These they usually sought to eradicate rather than to dissolve or transform, with the result that their will and perseverance, admirable as they were, often tyrannized over the just claims of contrary strains and stresses below the surface.

Mystics in general had little understanding of this repressed life.

The contribution of both the conscious and the subconscious aspects of the human is similarly recognized in a contemporary center, The School of Applied Philosophy, in New York, but with a more open-minded, scientific and progressive outlook on the subconscious. This school agrees with the mystic that stirring, ennobling experience is available to men through the depths of their own being, but it does not lump all this experience as "God," nor does it deal in a merely negative way with forces in the self striving in other directions. It regards these too as life, to be brought under cultivation, to be aided to a step by step development, and, as its transformation proceeds, to become actually a source of the dynamic requisite to the soul in its greater journeyings.

To those grown weary of the futility of just *wishing* to advance from what they are to what they would be, the School offers the assurance of a logical process of attainment. It has proven that the great gap between the present reality and the remote ideal can be bridged; that the way "from below up" to that which comes "from above down" can be built—and as reliably as any engineering project on earth.

At this school I have myself seen a wealth of evidence that the capacities of the higher man can be drawn into expression and that mystic experience, in a long range of gradations, is opened to the student in training. Here the techniques necessary for the deeper penetration have been evolved. They are of a scientific character, making full use of the methods which laboratory investigation has taught the West, with their advantages of observation, comparison, testing, recording, coordination of results.

Since the field of this school's researches is more extensive and subtle than that of the physical science laboratory, *more* observation is made, not less; *more* thorough analysis before synthesis; *more* testing and comparison before inferences are drawn. The techniques are of greater scope and have a much longer perspective than any as yet employed by psychoanalysis. They are part of this school's philosophic approach to the psychology of the unconscious. Such an approach is essential to a right evaluation of repressions, inhibitions, etc., on the one hand, and of aspirations and progressive trends on the other.

For over ten years I have watched the process of educating ordinarily neglected aspects and misunderstood potentialities, as it is conducted at this particular school. I can speak therefore from first-hand experience when I say that such careful, systematic study and graded training do not limit aspiration. So also with the questing of the mind. Its progress in insight and penetration, in the breaking through of barriers toward control in new territory, is assisted, not retarded, by careful check-up and comparison. The intellect has as much right to satisfaction as the heart to comfort and assurance.

The successful handling of the problems encountered by the progressing individual, the assimilation into practical living of the lessons learned, the gradual freeing of the self from the dominance of the personal, are an important chapter in the "science of the soul." It is this science which is taught at this school, much as ordinary sciences are taught in the conventional seats of learning. Study is balanced, however, by training, which is experiential, and includes individual "tutoring" in the early stages. In these stages the problems of the personality, its obstacles and

fixations, are taken in hand and their hold on the student lessened. The careful watch over growing sensitivities and powers, and their guidance, are continued in group research.

I make bold to say that nothing is more conducive to inward peace and quiet—yes, even in a torn and distracted world—than to know that conditions altogether transcending those of the environment and its worldly routine are discoverable to him who seeks, and who does what is necessary to attain. That such spheres of life have actual, verifiable, objective reality, are progressive within themselves, and can be shared with others who become qualified. That they are not a refuge in the sense of escape, but require a grooming of the non-material self as persevering as that which a queen of fashion gives her figure and her clothes. That, having found even in small degree the treasures which await the genuine seeker, the greatest hardships of this life can be more easily borne—can in fact be turned into the motive power of further advancement.

Within the purposes of this school is the furtherance of a philosophical psychology, as an integral part of the science of the soul. Psychology of such an order must, and at this school does, include the contributions of physical science, the modern psychology of the subconscious, religion, art, and philosophy in its true meaning—love of Wisdom. No aspects of life are belittled, but all are given their respective places. By emphasizing training as much as study, this school, unlike academic institutions, makes sure that a growing perspective is paralleled with enhanced qualities, faculties and stature in the self. That which is validly of the larger worlds, mental and spiritual, does not open to the personality, however strongly that

part of us may persuade itself to the contrary; nor to the mere student, however keen his intellect. In their relative inaccessibility, the larger worlds differ from the psychic areas, which are rather readily contacted—often too readily.

The field in which this school is working is actually the most significant frontier still open to man's explorations. It is the one to which he will have to turn when it finally dawns upon him that in devoting himself so exclusively to his material and affectional interests, he has made the proverbial bad bargain with his birthright. Some of the life-force he has turned to the conquest of the physical world must be turned to the conquest of his own powers and resources. If he has avoided this quest because he thought his satisfactions would come from outer circumstance, he must sooner or later come to realize that the answer is definitely in the negative. If he has avoided it because its trail leads through imponderables and subtleties, he should take heart. For the scientific method of inquiry he so rightly respects—in the West at least—is adaptable and applicable to the needs of his human nature as well.

The individual can, far more fully than he has as yet, carry out the precept, "Know thyself," by the use of the method laboratory science has placed at his disposal. When the true philosopher speaks of the necessity for self-knowledge, he means knowledge of vastly greater scope and content than is accessible to the conscious mind—has always meant this, whether he speaks the language of today or of thousands of years ago. The very fact that he is a philosopher signifies that his vision encompasses life as a whole, not merely the fragment that we ordinarily know of ourselves—our personality, or even

our whole life as related to the practical, material world of time and space.

Everyone has within the recesses of his being the seeds of mystical and spiritual development, however deeply they may be buried under the weight of conventional attitudes, intellectualism, or the handicaps of ignorance and lethargy. But in order to reach these deeper aspects, the more penetrating techniques of a philosophical psychology are essential. These areas are the media of inspiration and of intuitions of a super-personal nature. Revelations were not reserved alone for the prophet and seer of old. They are open, in this modern day too, to those who have attained the greater stature and heightened consciousness which alone give access to them. There are laws governing the exploration of these secrets. The school I have been discussing has trained many to the understanding and use of these laws. But thousands should be enlisted in this work, not a few score, and its earlier stages at least should be, and, let us hope will be, included in the general education of the future. If that education continues to be directed, as it now is, solely to the demands of the material world, continued conflict and even greater disorganization must ensue.

So I end this book as I began it, in my introduction, with a plea for an open mind toward the potentialities in the human organism not wholly related to the interests of the personal, or lower, self. My own experience, and that of many men and women ranking well above average intelligence, is that these potentialities can become the noblest powers man possesses, and are the real bridge to his Promised Land—to spiritual goals.

Is it too much to ask that a modicum of the billions now being spent on materialistic ends be devoted to

an investigation, with qualified subjects, into the validity of this modern education of the higher self and its *rapprochement* with planes of larger, spiritual reality? Into the possibility of man contacting other (not psychic) conditions of being and dwelling in harmonious relationship with them? Into the possibility of his gaining such a majestic perspective of life that he would find it altogether desirable to live in accord with its implications? An inquiry of this nature might well mean that the values which are acquired or defended with the billions now poured into armament would be rationally replaced by a new concept of life and of living which would be of enormous aid in the construction of a new world order,

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